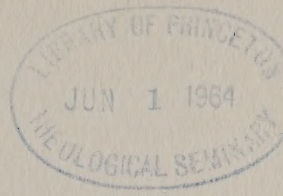


BV 2803 .A4 R6 1963
Rodli, Agnes Sylvia.
North of heaven

NORTH OF HEAVEN



NORTH OF HEAVEN

*A Teaching Ministry
among the Alaskan Indians*

By ✓
AGNES RODLI



MOODY PRESS
CHICAGO

COPYRIGHT ©, 1963, BY
THE MOODY BIBLE INSTITUTE
OF CHICAGO

Printed in the United States of America

Lovingly dedicated to the
memory of Agnes Nikolai who went
ahead to see my brother

Contents

Chapter	Page
ONE -:- Nikolai Bound	11
TWO -:- We Become Acquainted	30
THREE -:- Together We Learn	46
FOUR -:- The Social Event of the Season.....	58
FIVE -:- Out of Darkness into Light.....	70
SIX -:- A Pleasant Surprise	83
SEVEN -:- A Time to Relax.....	98
EIGHT -:- A Great Construction Project.....	114
NINE -:- The Big Moving Day.....	130
TEN -:- New Addition to the Faculty.....	144
ELEVEN -:- Fruit of Labor	152
TWELVE -:- Rallying to the Cause.....	165
THIRTEEN -:- We Bid Farewell	183

Preface

NORTH OF HEAVEN is the story of my three years in Nikolai, a village of interior Alaska.

Even as all people are alike and yet all are different, so Nikolai was like other Athabascan Indian villages, yet different. The people had problems common to their race as well as problems of their very own. For the sake of perspective, I have relived my days among them as objectively as possible. Where my own feelings enter in, please remember that part of me will always be in Nikolai.

I wish to express my gratitude to those who encouraged and helped in the writing of this account, and to Margaret Reese who suggested its name, NORTH OF HEAVEN. To acknowledge each one who contributed either directly or indirectly would be impossible. That, I think, will be understood.

ONE -:- Nikolai Bound

THIS IS SOME PREDICAMENT to find ourselves in. I can think of only one place left to try and that is the Salvation Army."

"Oh, no, not them. They help people in trouble, people in need."

"And what do you call this? Almost midnight and here we are stranded in the depot at Anchorage, Alaska, not knowing a soul in town. It's tourist season and every hotel room taken. Look, the janitor has his broom and the clerks are closing up the place. We must get out and I'm calling the Salvation Army."

I could hear the phone ringing at the other end of the line. Someone picked up the receiver, "Salvation Army."

"This is Agnes Rodli speaking. Another missionary and I are here at the train depot. We arrived this evening from the States and we haven't a place to stay. We had the name of a church and a pastor, but we failed to write the information down and we have forgotten. Could you help us?"

"This is Mrs. Clithroe. The Major would know whom you want, I am sure, but he isn't here right now. You say you have no place to stay?"

"No, we haven't. They are closing the station in a few minutes. Well — uh — do you have any extra beds?"

"Not for women."

"Oh."

"But you can't stay in the station."

"Yes, we know . . ."

"I'll tell you what. We have a man staying in our home

which is directly behind the Army. I'll ask him to give up his room and move into the men's dormitory for the night. Call a cab and come right over. We'll be looking for you."

Mildred James and I, missionary-teachers on our way to the Kuskokwim River country, hardly expected to be "rescued" by the Salvation Army our first night in Alaska, but we will forever be grateful for their help. The next morning they contacted the Anchorage Gospel Tabernacle where Claude and Lucille Rossignol pastored. We stayed with them while marking time for the next plane to McGrath, the closest airstrip to the village of our choice. They were quite dubious about our venture inland. Did we know what we were getting into? No, we didn't.

We tried in vain to find anyone who would be encouraging about the months ahead. In the first place, we were told we did not look like missionaries. I have never figured out just what that means, but a casual look comes natural with me and that may have been the difficulty. Blonde hair, just curly enough to be unmanageable, earned me the title of "youngster." Mildred, a few years older, is my opposite, brunette with serious voice and calm mannerisms born of quiet confidence. While I am running around in a complete dither trying to get organized, she is doing her work and doing it well.

When new acquaintances suggested that we would better ourselves spending the winter in Anchorage, it was Mildred who answered with the finality needed. We would not be turned from our path. We were Nikolai-bound and would be buying one-way tickets to McGrath.

A rainy Monday morning we boarded a plane for the interior. Three rainy hours later we arrived in McGrath and stood on the porch of the Northern Commercial Company store wondering which way to turn. It was well that no band met us — one strain of the Star Spangled Banner would

have put me in tears. To think I left the beautiful Indian reservation of California for this mudhole! If Mildred saw mist in my eyes, she thought it was rain. Anyway, she was looking for Dick and Helen, friends of her school days. They were to orientate us and later take us to Nikolai.

A tall man stepped out from the warehouse. Mildred called to him, "Dick!"

"Well, Mildred. At last you are here. We were afraid you would get talked into staying in Anchorage," he added with a twinkle in his eye.

"They tried," she admitted, "but never succeeded."

Our advent in McGrath was just that uneventful. McGrath folk were as dubious of us as Anchorage people had been. Even Helen could hardly wait until introductions were over to warn, "You look like you can take it, Mildred, but Agnes —"

Her remark put iron in my veins. I would stick it out if it killed me. How human we are! More specifically, how human I am! I later learned it would take more than a determination on my part to prove I could take it, to hold me three years in the village.

When the weather cleared, Helen and the children, Bernice and Mac, went berry picking. Mildred and I joined them. Mildred picked two berries to my one because I dreamed as I reached through ragged shrubs for gems of blue. I saw them as people. Beneath a withered leaf, pressed against a mossy log, in time they would fall to decay unless someone made the effort to reach them.

Mildred called, "Many berries?"

"Yes. Some," I answered absently.

Though her query was not an intended reminder, it was nevertheless timely and I stooped to coaxing blueberries out of hiding. Because the bushes were low and dense, a per-

son's eyes almost had to be trained to pan the blue nuggets. They were a challenge.

The sun was a deep glow on the horizon and the air was getting bitey. Pickers were tired. Helen did not have to call twice to convince us that it was quitting time. We ambled slowly townward comparing our gain, hard-earned and that much more appreciated. We might have found a larger field or one closer to home, but for all our careful planning the day would be a long day simply because blueberries are where you find them. That day we found them well off the beaten trail.

McGrath: two general stores, two bars, two airlines offices, and two hundred people who made you like them. They also made you wait. One of our most difficult lessons was that away from its few grown-up settlements, life in the far North moves at a slow pace. Our freight had apparently been held up by the railroad or some trucking company. Each day found us stopping at one of the airlines' offices to inquire. No one knew and what's more, no one really cared. Perhaps it would come tomorrow. If we expressed anxiety, we could expect an unruffled answer which meant it would not hurt us to stay around another day or two. They meant a month or two! What was the big hurry? Thus we learned to take our time. Not knowing whether we would have another opportunity to get supplies once in our village, we spent hours on our shopping list. Try estimating nine months' supply of sugar, flour and milk; smaller items can even be more annoying. Make four loaves of bread every week and a half for fifty-two weeks: how much yeast will you need?

Suggestions came from every direction. A neighbor called from across the road, "I was slicing cheese and got to wondering if you had any mouse-traps. You'll need more than

one. I'm warning you, the field mice will be in when it begins to snow."

Our list grew. A newcomer to the North is called a "cheechako." When the name was tacked on us it should have been spelled with capital letters. We hardly knew enough about Alaska and village life to ask an intelligent question. Kind folks gave us valuable pointers on adapting ourselves to our new environment; others, and perhaps as well-meaning, gave advice that we later learned should have been thoroughly screened. We had fun and we gained by listening and comparing notes later.

During our stay in McGrath our home was a one-room cabin on the bank of the Kuskokwim. Our cabin floor boasted two dips and a hump. What rattled when we walked over it was the cellar door. We breathed the smell of rotting wood where floor boards rested on the damp earth, twice dampened by the pump in the center of the room that creaked and leaked from rust and age.

Here, our first Yukon stove entered. In other parts of Alaska, a heater of that name may answer to another description, but in McGrath a Yukon stove is a converted oil drum placed lengthwise on iron legs. We learned the fine art of balancing a coffeepot on its rounded top, scooting it here and there until we knew by its merry tune which was the hottest spot. We felt the romance of another era as we sat by the window and traced the outline of abandoned cabins on the opposite shore. Suddenly we would be jarred into present-day atmosphere by a pontoon plane landing on the water in front of us. Slipping along in the fading light of an August evening, it too will share of romance after the colors have been softened by the brush of time.

The Kuskokwim River boasts little beauty. The land to either side of it lies low and flat. Much of the country is made up of unmeasured stretches of muskeg and tundra,

only occasional wooded areas and high spots waiting to be found by persistent pioneers. In fall the land is quick to borrow from the first frost to turn the cottonwoods into a panorama of color. Turbulent mountain streams have by then given of their strength and the great river moves sluggishly, content to reflect the glory about it. Between us and the purple-gray hills in the distance were wooded areas where rich gold and reds blended with brown of decaying trees and lifeless branches. I could see as well as feel the stillness of the far North, stillness that to some is cruel and drives them back to the cities. To others it seems kind and beckons to come deeper. We felt its gentle tug.

Freight or not, we had to move up river. We planned our day of departure with the consolation that we would hear via Tundra Topics when the delayed freight finally arrived. What was Tundra Topics? A night program that broadcasts messages to people in out-of-the-way places and a smattering of news that might be of interest to listeners. If we were told once, we were told two dozen times, "Don't forget to tune in your radio at nine-thirty each evening to KFAR, Fairbanks."

McGrath had become home and not all of me wanted to leave. When the Monday for our trip came, however, we were up early carrying and dragging our very earthly goods down to the boat. We were to go up the Kuskokwim in a thirty-two footer squared off at the stern as if the builder had become impatient and cut it short. The cabin resembled a cheese box with a ceiling that was sort of an optical illusion. It looked high enough for the average person, but was not and you seldom remembered until you started and abruptly stopped right in the little doorway. The long row of glassless windows was curtained with discolored canvas to break the wind. The boat itself looked a far cry from

comfort, but we were not asking for comfort. All we desired was that it get us to our destination.

After all inanimate objects were put on board, ten-year-old Bernice and six-year-old Mac were relegated to the back of the cabin and instructed not to put feet on the parts of the engine that lay uncovered. Mildred found a place near the center of the cabin. She sat on a sack of flour while I seated myself opposite on my blue suitcase. Taking their *places* near the bow were Dick and Helen, pilot and navigator.

Scheduled time of departure, eight o'clock in the morning. Actual departure, four in the afternoon. By that time Mildred and I could easily have waited another day. We were told we could still count on a fair two hours' run before putting in for the night. The water was still, disturbed only by the waves we set in motion; they in turn sent the mirrored trees into a nervous dance. The September nights had been freezing, and many of the birds had already flown to warmer climates. It looked as if we human beings were traveling the wrong direction.

Unwise to campers' ways, we thought big game was in sight when Dick grabbed his gun and fired three shots into the air. Had there been big game, he certainly would not be firing thus at random, but we hadn't thought of that. Lifting the canvas curtain and poking our heads out for a clearer view of the goings-on gave us no satisfaction.

We thought for a moment that there was movement in the bushes, then realized it was imagination. At this point Helen turned to see us and quickly explained, "Jack Kennedy left for his traplines the middle of last month. We told him we would be stopping at his camp on our way to Nikolai. He's probably been looking for us for weeks, so we are letting him know we're coming."

After locating a suitable place to tie the boat, they

literally grounded it on the sandbar. We walked to the bow and leaped to solid footing. By that time the tall, lanky, once-upon-a-time-from-Texas trapper was down to the river's edge to welcome his visitors with an unsurpassed outburst of cordiality. He stood with his hat in hand, the crisp wind blowing whisps of his hair up and out in same direction as the corners of his mouth. His was an infectious smile. He had been ready and waiting for weeks. He had almost given up looking but he knew, yes, he knew we wouldn't fail him. Not when he was counting on it so much, we wouldn't. When he heard shots, he just knew we had come. Waving his hands toward the almost imperceptible trail leading up from the sandbar, he turned to guide us through the tall grass, over a foot bridge, and across the squashy ground to his cabin.

Helen brought a pot of stew and Mildred had baked two apple pies which we were certain would make the bachelor's eyes widen. Alas, their culinary arts took second place for he had made a pot of beans!

No sooner had we ducked through the small entrance and located the Yukon stove where we could warm our hands, than he began in his drawl, "Now, you uns must have some of my beans. Now, isn't it luck I cooked them beans? I just had a feeling to make a big mess of 'em for supper. Course if you hadn't come, I coulda et on 'em tomorrow too. I'm not bragging or anything, but I'm telling you them's the best beans, yessir, the best beans —"

About that time I lost track of further conversation for my curiosity was a jump ahead of my appetite. The cabin was well chinked with moss and had been sturdy from the day of its birth. I never went into the lean-to, but the main room had the standard cabin furnishings: an old table, a cupboard, and a bed which was hand-hewn boards nailed on a wood frame. A chair, a few boxes, some magazines,

and a calendar on the wall completed the room. What we could not see, although keenly felt, was the clutter of everyday living enfolded in a friendly atmosphere created by a delighted host. We, the guests, would never be more welcome anywhere.

The beans were good and the coffee was strong. The stew and pies tasted all right, but definitely they took second place. After a couple hours of visiting, we travelers were ready to call it a day. After a few more hours Mildred and I, too recently from the land of box springs and mattresses, were ready to call it a night. Ours had been the bunk with only our sleeping bags around us. By morning I knew each board under me and exactly how far apart those boards were. Forbid that I should complain when Jack was stirring up his hotcakes for our breakfast. They more than made up for what we had endured during the supposed sleeping hours.

Jack accompanied us back over the narrow trail by the deep grass heavy with early dew. We waited on the sandbar while he went out in his little weathered rowboat to check his fishnets. Could we stay for a fish fry? That would have been great but we had to express our regrets, whereupon he gave us part of his catch to take with us for later in the day. To leave him seemed heartless, as we had been with him only long enough for our visit to be a teaser, only long enough to make him come aware of his loneliness. Had we been in his cabin two or three days, he might have been glad to be rid of us. As it was, we left him in the thin light of dawn, standing on the edge of the river facing months on his trapline with his dogs as his only companions.

The two days following purred along with sameness, hours and hours of travel, listening to the sucking sound of the canvas curtains teased by the wind. Nights we camped by an open fire and slept under the shelter of a tarp. At

noon we stopped on sandbars to build a fire and have hurried lunches from cans. All the childhood stories of the lost princess who washed in the rippling brook became strictly fairy tales. Romantic in description, such washes are not exactly thorough when the soap has been forgotten at home on the washstand and the new supply is at the bottom of nobody-knows-which box.

There was the evening I stooped to splash cold water over my face. Bubbles! Where did the bubbles come from?

"O Mildred, look! Bubbles . . ."

I saw my answer. Mildred was brushing her teeth. Miles of water, and I had to choose that particular spot! There was nothing to do but to shake the sand out of my towel and proceed on my muttering way to the upstream end of the toothbrush brigade.

No definite changes of scenery had met us since we left McGrath; willow, tundra, long stretches of sandbar, and more willows with a background of white birch, cottonwood, or spruce. Occasionally among the evergreen trees we would catch a glimpse of a cabin or a cache that might still be used by a trapper for his winter supplies or as an emergency shelter if he became lost. Caches, small log buildings elevated on poles to discourage prowling bears and to insure a dry floor during spring breakup, are as important to frontier Alaska as pockets are to a nine-year-old boy. Whatever the owner of a cache *thinks* he might need at a later date goes into the cache whether boots, mittens, dried fish, broken sleds, oatmeal, dog collars, or rusty hinges. The cache claims another feature all its own; back in one of its dark corners it is almost dead sure to have what you need.

We came in sight of Big River village Wednesday afternoon. A few log cabins and caches, racks for drying fish, and dozens of old dog houses well grown over told us the village was a has-been. It was a relic of days when roadhouses had

flourished for the benefit of dog-team travelers. An Alaskan roadhouse is a house by the side of the road for the trail-weary, and many trail-weary men had stopped at Big River located on the route formerly used by the dog team mail run between McGrath and Fairbanks. The village had dwindled to a fish camp with the coming of the air age. (Planes now make in two hours the trip that used to cost two weeks and several hundred dollars.) The few white men in that area had wandered elsewhere; the natives had drifted back to their own people. Only two or three families claimed Big River.

This was our first stop at a real native village. Mildred and I were trying to take in everything with one sweeping look. We focused our attention on the people on the river bank who watched our every move. A bit surprised we saw them in western clothing. We hadn't really expected to see them in feathers and furs, but I do not know exactly what we expected. We have since learned that the remotest points of Alaska have accepted cotton clothing for summer wear.

When the boat nosed gently into the soft mud near the river bank, we jumped out and scrambled up to meet the villagers. Dick and Helen introduced us. "Mildred and Agnes. Go to Nikolai to teach school."

"Yes? That good."

"You go to Nikolai when fish run is over?"

"Maybe."

As they exchanged bits of McGrath news, Mildred and I attached ourselves to several youngsters who took us sight-seeing. The children fascinated us although they were dirty and ragged. Most of them were barefoot; a few had canvas footwear. A couple of the older ones wore shoepaks or heavy boots. What matter the feet? Their laughing, dark brown eyes that sparkled and talked, when their lips said nothing, fascinated us.

We tried to talk to the children, but obviously they did not understand us. We skirted around the buildings to see a three-legged dog which they pointed to with pride. Sled dogs are not pretty without their heavy winter coats and a healthy layer of flesh underneath. When not using the dogs, the owners keep them underfed. We were not inclined to linger around smelly dog houses. Taking the initiative to wander out of the village proper, we came upon a cemetery overgrown with grass and small willows. Numbly impressed by the number of infant-sized graves, we turned away without comment.

Circling back to the old roadhouse, we were invited inside to warm our hands by the Yukon stove. Lacking anything else to say, we kept rubbing our hands and saying how good the heat felt. The natives watched. We liked their unassuming manner and assured ourselves that we would also like Nikolai.

That reminded us. "Many people in Nikolai now?" we asked the handsome Indian who appeared to be the leader.

"Some people maybe."

"You know some people there?"

"Alexis family maybe. Maybe Dennis," he answered in his own noncommittal way.

We failed in our fragmentary conversations, but at least we were assured there were people in Nikolai. We had heard before we left McGrath that no one was in the village but one old woman who could not understand English. That together with stories of the nomadic traits of the people was almost enough to change our plans. Sometimes I wondered if we knew what we were doing, but in quieter moments doubts were overruled. We had learned of other villages more promising, of towns that could offer at least a few conveniences, only to put them out of our minds. We had to go to Nikolai. Jesus must needs go through Samaria; Philip

was sent along a lonely road to the south; we had to go to Nikolai.

We could not stay at Big River. Within minutes we were preparing to go on, hoping that at a later date we would again come in contact with these people. We tried desperately to picture them clearly in our minds for future reference. We noted tribal or family features common to them all, the dark brown or black hair that openly resisted training and the brown eyes so brown they seemed black. The women were short, none of them measuring up to my five feet four. The men were taller. The children were completely artless, plain and lovable.

I noticed one girl of about eighteen years. She stood behind the stove, not giving in to the customary self-conscious giggle of the women. Her eyes had a faraway look that attracted me and I wanted to talk to her, but I could think of nothing to say. Mrs. Deaphan, a wiry young woman with hardworking hands and a ready smile, helped the situation by motioning to her and explaining, "We move Nikolai after fish gone. Kathryn she go to school. All time she say she want school. She want read and write."

"Good. Good," Mildred and I both answered at once. "We want her in school." Then turning to the girl we encouraged her. "We glad to see you come, Kathryn. Glad to see all boys and girls come."

So that was our introduction to Kathryn. She shifted her feet and turned away. Her even features were silhouetted against the light of the cloudy window. I saw her not as a pretty girl, but as a plain girl who deserved a chance to learn. What she would do with the opportunity might be another story, but to each is, nevertheless, the right to learn.

I opened my mouth to give her further encouragement, to tell her again we wanted her in our school, but my words

were left unsaid. She was shy and more words might cause more embarrassment than good. I was relieved when Dick broke in with a lusty, "All aboard!"

Big River looked much like a piece of driftwood in the distance. Each on the boat had settled back to his thoughts. Mildred shut her eyes and leaned against the wall that was vibrating with the efforts of the gas motor. The jiggling was uncomfortable. She looked around for her red sweater. There, that made a good pillow. I watched, casually wondering what she was thinking.

Looking through the back opening of the boat cabin, my mind strayed again to Big River.. The camp itself wasn't bothering me, but the memory of the teen-ager back of the stove haunted me. I knew practically nothing about her, but I did know that I could never forget the reference made to her wanting to learn to read and write. The few short sentences were like a slap in the face because I had always complained of my lack of the education that I wanted. I had indulged in a certain amount of self-pity over it. How grieved the Lord must have been over my ingratitude. Here was one who was only a few years younger and yet had had no opportunity to learn even to write her own name. The comparison was cutting. I stared at the toes of my boots, with which I was mentally kicking myself around. I asked to be forgiven. I had considered myself justified in complaining; now I saw it as a great sin.

We were roused by loud whispers to the fore. "Quick! O where's my camera? Get the gun." By then Mildred and I had poked our heads through the doorway and became as excited as Dick and Helen.

A moose, motionless as a picture. Standing in the muddy water, he was hardly beautiful though certainly majestic in his setting of brown and gold foliage.

At Helen's command I grabbed the boat wheel. The

hunters knew they were too far from the animal to chance taking a shot and motioned me to steer the boat closer to shore. The river currents were unfamiliar and furthermore I did not know anything about steering a boat. I plowed out of the main channel and into shallow water and sand. Dick jumped out of the boat and tried to shove it free; it refused to budge. That in turn upset Helen who thought surely her husband was going to drown, but he wasn't. The water was not deep enough to go over his hip boots.

All the while, whether one minute or six I do not know, the moose kept his spot and watched the intruders. There remained one thing for Dick and Helen to do — shoot!

Both fired. The great animal turned to run, then as suddenly wheeled about as if to charge in our direction. My heart beat wildly, partly from fear and partly with excitement. Helen was talking in muffled phrases to herself. All we could hear was "dangerous" and "might charge." We pieced it together and drew our own conclusions. Somebody ought to do something; I didn't know what. No one did anything. It was a game and his was the next move.

We waited. At last the animal took another couple of steps toward us and stopped. He wavered and with another step he stumbled and fell with a mighty splash. We had expected a fight; now it was all over. A cheer went up from the huddle in the green boat. There lay our winter's meat. The creature had fallen in shallow water. To pull him to shore was a simple matter with ropes and all hands to the work. Dick and Mildred did the skinning. Mildred had often helped her father with butchering, therefore was able to go ahead with dressing the meat. Helen appointed herself chief photographer and began taking pictures. Front view, side view, with Dick, without Dick, with the children, without them, on and on. After all, it was her shot that had downed the brute.

Helen had her project well in hand; the competent butchers preferred to work without annoyance of a helper. Everyone wants to be wanted, but no one wanted me. I stood looking as useless as I was. Finally someone asked for the hatchet from the boat and I volunteered to get it. Wading into the river, I stepped into a hole, gasping as the icy water filled my boots. No mistake about the Kuskokwim having its source in the mountains! As the afternoon shadows grew longer, I cruised out for many a forgotten item, and was chilled to the bone, yet having the time of my life.

Only a rim of the sun shone above the trees. Night was moving in rapidly. Mr. Moose had not been too accomodating as far as choosing a camp site was concerned. We had no alternative but to cross the river to spend the night. After the meat was securely tied up in the trees, Dick and I then shoved the boat loose from the bar and we all crossed to the other side.

Rain began to come down, first lightly and then in a drizzle that threatened to dampen the spirits of the good-natured crew. We needed fire and supper. Mildred and I whispered. Wet sticks. We wouldn't even have a fire. About that time we were asked to help the children peel the paper-like bark from birch trees.

I gave Mildred a sidelong glance and said quietly, "It won't burn."

"I know it, but don't say anything."

Dutifully we peeled a bit of bark to add to the children's handful. To our complete amazement, those shreds caught fire the moment a match was put to them. In a short time there was a hot meal for the six hungry people who had been too interested in the hunt to take time to eat.

Makeshift tents were hurriedly put up, for when we had time to realize how tired we were, we wasted no time getting into our sleeping bags.

At the first suggestion of daylight I was awake, because I was cold. Still worse, I was wet. My camp cot had been placed too near the edge of the tarp that acted as a ceiling and water had poured off it onto me. I lifted my head and listened. Would no one waken and build a fire? At last through the stillness, broken only by the insistent patter of rain, I heard Dick chopping wood. There would soon be a fire, the call of "Coffee!" When the call came, I got up to discover the rain had filled the toes of my boots. They were no drier than when I had taken them off. The rest of my clothes felt like a well-sprinkled batch of ironing.

"Mildred," I moaned, "my clothes are wet."

"They're wet all right. But at best we can't be more than a couple days from Nikolai. Then you can have dry clothes."

What else could she say?

The return to the other side of the river brought new problems. The boat that was all too willing the day before to lodge itself on a bar now stubbornly refused to do it. Since the others were to work on the meat, someone (good thing I can't remember who) decided I should keep the boat from drifting. An empty five-gallon gas can was placed in the water and I was told to stand on the can and hold the boat. An unpatented idea, and all went well for a matter of minutes. I stood in my place chatting with the children and not realizing the current was shifting the sand under the can. Suddenly the can was out from under me and without warning I was tossed into the river. The cold bath took my breath away and I couldn't have yelled if I had tried. Mac and Bernice filled in with, "Aggie fell in. Aggie fell in."

Up to her neck! Someone helped me back into the boat and built a fire in the camp stove for my benefit. Soaked to the skin, I had no other clothes I could get to, so I sat in the cabin all day trying to get dry. I never did get completely

dry, but neither did I catch cold so I was really none the worse for my dip.

Then someone thought of a practical method for holding the boat. While I stayed with the children, the others spent several hours working among the trees. First they made a shelter from the rain with a large tarp. Then they cut down small trees to make poles from which to hang the meat, and fastened the poles high in the trees. Thus three quarters were hung out of reach of wolves and bears. One quarter was tied to the top of the boat cabin for use in Nikolai.

The late afternoon found us once more making our few miles an hour, and by evening the bend in the river known as The Landing was reached. Having heard much about The Landing, we dragged ourselves to the bow to get a good view of the settlement. To our amazement, no one came to greet us and it dawned on Mildred and myself that most of the buildings were not dwellings but warehouses.

The Landing is a trading post, its only permanent residents the trader and his wife, Clint and Bertha. We walked up the winding dirt road to the store and went in. There we met Clint, a tall, thin man who moved slowly and talked slowly, or not at all. His wife, Bertha, was short, very French and very hospitable. We later learned that she was a terrific cook and not all who went to The Landing went to shop. There were those who timed their trips to be there at mealtime. If they missed it they would stay until time for another meal. Once or twice a week a bush plane landed on their small airstrip to bring mail, supplies, and news, but for the most part their customers were trappers, miners, hunters and Nikolai folk.

The store intrigued us. Every available space was utilized. The shelves were crammed, and many items were stacked on the floor or on chairs. The absence of price markers and

advertising was glaring. No competition within hundreds of square miles, what need had they of either.

A bedraggled party, we were somewhat embarrassed to present ourselves at the front door of the spacious two-story log house, but we were welcomed in spite of the tracks we made across a spotless floor. After a hearty dinner we were directed to a cabin where we could spend the night. The native cabin, as it was called, had been built by Nikolai men for their use whenever a trip to The Landing demanded their staying more than a day. Inasmuch as none of them were there, we moved in. Ah, sweet luxury, going to sleep with a roof over our heads, being serenaded by the popping and cracking of a wood fire in the Yukon stove.

With the break of day we aroused ourselves, rolled up our sleeping bags, and made ready to continue upstream. Returning to the big house for breakfast before confining ourselves to the boat again, we were invited into the kitchen. There we were served an Alaskan breakfast of powdered eggs scrambled with onions and canned sausage. We asked our hostess for her recipe. She gave us detailed directions for mixing the eggs with water the evening before and stirring in the dehydrated onions so they would be soft by morning. The dish may not be written down in the famous recipes of the world, but any Kuskokwim traveler will testify it hits the spot.

TWO --: We Become Acquainted

I STOOD ON DECK that morning hoping the weak warmth of the early sun would penetrate through my dampish sweater and deep into my tired muscles. On our last day of travel we cheechakos considered ourselves thoroughly schooled when it came to roughing it in the bush country. We were ready to be graduated.

"There you are, girls. A fish wheel. That probably belongs to a Nikolai native."

"Where? Where?" as we practically fell over each other trying to get the first look.

Ahead we saw a huge old wheel, like a mill wheel, turning slowly in the water. Fish caught in the wire "baskets" were thrown onto slanted boards which gave them a quick slide into a live box at the side of the wheel. There they stayed till the owner of the wheel came for his catch. Fish wheels seem a part of Alaska itself, but actually they were introduced to the territory back in the 1880's. Leave it to the Yankees to get a fine idea along the Mississippi and carry it all over the world.

Over a stretch of miles these crude wooden "creatures" became more frequent and a deserted summer fish camp back among the trees gave evidence that we were nearing a village. We rounded a few more bends in the river and whiled away a few more hours. Feelings were a warm mixture of excitement and contentment as we realized we were almost to our new home.

There presented in all of its plainness was Nikolai. Yet,

with some stretch of imagination, it was quaintly pretty in its homely way. We might better describe our village as a huddle of tents and cabins with leaning caches in between. Within the village were smaller villages of dog houses and gaunt-looking fish racks reaching their scrawny arms outward to be draped with strips of salmon. Like a tired sentinel watching over the community stood the Russian Orthodox Church. As opposed to the log dwellings, the building had been finished with mill lumber and perhaps had once had a coat of paint. Now its color told only of weather, changing seasons and neglect.

People began to gather on the river bank. A few women and a dozen children watched us as we came closer. The men pretended to be busy with their own affairs, but when the boat nudged against the bar and Dick called for someone to take the rope, they were on the job. The women backed away, talking and laughing quietly.

Knowing they were not laughing with us, I had the impression they might be laughing at us. I watched with a half-lonely feeling. We had thought they would stay to give us some kind of welcome, but being farther away from other settlements they were obviously more timid than the folk at Big River. Getting off the boat we climbed the bank to stamp on our minds a picture that will never leave us.

Tin cans, boxes, dried and curled animal skins, chunks of raw moosehide, balls of dog hair, and clumps of dry grass comprised the river front. Farther back were tents and cabins in irregular rows facing the water. There was not a tree in the village to break the man-made scene. Hungry, sleepy-eyed dogs looked at us with not enough interest in us to rise and bark.

To the right was a rack of fish with a small fire smoldering underneath, not enough smoke and too many flies. A few pieces of black, stringy meat hung with the fish and I

wanted to, but did not, go over and add fuel to the fire, giving the fish a good smoking as I had watched the Klamath River Indians do.

Our host had visited Nikolai the previous winter and had promised to try his best to get teachers to move to the village. In turn the village leaders had agreed to provide living quarters. Dick introduced us to the Chief and Second Chief. In appearance they were turned around. Second Chief stood erect and walked as if the world were at his command. He spoke an understandable amount of English and his iron-gray hair and his neat, well-kept appearance made him look every inch a chief. Chief just did not look the part. We were told that his few words in his own language were powerful words, but we saw him as a round-shouldered little man who seldom talked. He was content to let others interpret for him, adding his own "Yaah, yaah," in the middle of someone else's sentence.

"These teachers we tell you about," Dick explained.

"Yaah, yaah," Chief answered indifferently.

"You say, 'You bring teacher, we give cabin.' You got cabin for them?"

"Yaah, yaah."

Second Chief interrupted, "We got my place. Come."

He motioned to follow him up the path to his dwelling complete with two rooms, the only one of its size in the village. Like Big River, Nikolai had once been a stopping place for dog-teams going from McGrath to Lake Minchumina and on to Fairbanks. This log building that was to be ours had been a roadhouse. The first room we entered was the larger of the two rooms, about fourteen by eighteen feet and we promptly dedicated it to the cause of education. A stove in the center and crude shelves the full length of one side were its only furnishings. The shelves were as cluttered as the floor was bare, as a former

prospector had aspirations of starting a trading post there the year before. He left part of his stock behind him and the uninteresting array had remained untouched: teapots and teapots, old corn flakes and more teapots.

The second room was occupied by Second Chief, his wife and daughter. Not knowing exactly when we were coming, they had not yet moved out to their new tent at the side of the building. We were fully aware of being given the best the village had. The room was presentable with a bed and a cot, a table, three chairs and two small stoves, one on either side of the room. The ceiling was lined with cheap red print material tacked here and there leaving blousy spots like huge pillows. Bare logs would have been easier on the eyes, but we learned this measure had a purpose other than art. Moss and dirt from the sod roof would be slipping down the backs of our necks every time we shut the door.

Helen stood in the middle of the room, arms akimbo, and gave the place a once-over estimate. "Glad I don't live here."

We stared at her in amazement. Why, this was better than we had hoped for. We thought ourselves lucky to have a bed, indeed privileged for we later counted only four beds in the whole settlement. As I pondered our reaction to her statement, however, I realized the "why" of our contentment with the room. It was ours and as such we were ready to defend it, if necessary.

Dick was busy giving the village leaders a few pointers. "Girls live here. Teach children. You cut wood, pack water. Too hard for them that work. Okay?"

"Yaah."

"Be good to them," and then wisely, "No drinking when you have school and teachers."

"Yaah. No drink."

With that settled, and final repeated instructions about listening to Tundra Topics, after only three-quarters of

an hour in our village they circled the little island in the river and chugged down stream. Mildred and I stood alone on the river bank until the tubby green boat was long out of sight.

Alone in a village where we could identify exactly two people, Chief and Second Chief! Anyway, we had started at the top.

Mildred turned toward the cabin and trudged slowly up the slope with me close at her heels. A tin can lay in the narrow path. She kicked it with the toe of her boot. I gathered a handful of straw to break into bits and toss at the wind. We felt strangely self-conscious. Thrilled? Not particularly. I had thought that when we arrived we would have a feeling of really having arrived. Perhaps we were trading our one great moment for lesser moments along the way.

At our doorway Mildred stopped. She gave me a quick glance that meant, "Don't miss this." I raised my chin over her shoulder to watch Chief and two other men looking through some of our belongings in washtubs. We wondered if perhaps by virtue of office the older man was free to take whatever caught his eye. Chief toyed with flashlight batteries.

"McGrath?"

"Yes. We buy them in McGrath."

"I need."

"All right, Chief. You take."

"Yaah, yaah," and out of the door he went with his newly acquired batteries, undoubtedly homeward bound to see if they were any good. They must have been as he never returned to exchange them.

Mildred remarked rather absently, "Guess we'll have a bite to eat," meaning, "Did we set a bad precedent, or should we have ignored him?"

I didn't know so I agreed it was time to eat.

We took out only those groceries we needed immediately, shoving most of the boxes under the table until we could decide how to arrange our house. An assortment of cupboards kept the first family's supplies as their tent was only eight by ten. We could not even think of asking them to move everything out for us. In a sense we would be living together, but if they never complained certainly we should be satisfied.

The evening wore on as our curious people continued to file in and out without speaking. Now and then Mildred ventured a question, receiving only self-conscious giggles for reply, or more often no response. If they were not going to visit with us, we thought it would be rather nice if they went out — we had work to do. Surely they read our thoughts for one by one they conveniently left. After the last person made his way out, Mildred pushed the warped door shut announcing we were going to start unpacking. She was somewhat overly triumphant about getting rid of everyone, but her actions could be justified. It had been a week since we had slept between clean sheets.

No sooner had we opened our suitcases than, *cr-e-a-k*. Scraping the uneven floor, the door was pushed open. In came Nick, a young chap who had been around non-native trappers quite a bit and was proud of his limited command of English. He was glad to talk; that is, in spurts he was glad to talk. Mildred put him to work on the aerial for her radio. The room began slowly filling up with people again, and it was long into the night before they decided to go home. By the time the last person went out again, we had learned enough to bolt the door.

Sunday morning no one disturbed us. We lay in bed a long time luxuriating in the smell of clean sheets. Each asked the other questions which neither could answer. What did

the people think of us? Did they understand us? We had no way of arriving at answers. We wondered, but without apprehensions — just sort of wondered.

Then we heard it, the dull clanging of the church bell. This we had to see. We were surprised to hear it as we had been told that years had passed since a priest had last visited the village. The bell which was separate from the church hung from a sturdy frame high above the reach of children. We watched a man pulling at the long rope while people came up the three main trails of the village. Mrs. Second Chief came out of her tent in a long white dress with rows and rows of gay ribbon. She was an attractive woman with a quiet bearing that would demand notice in circles other than her home village.

All the women and girls were decked out in their best which for most of them was a cotton dress and heavy jacket. The men and boys wore suit coats. One lad wore a coat that hung below his knees, his hands completely lost in the grown-up sleeves. Their walk was slow and heavy, as in deep snow. I felt sorry for them. Their dress, talk and customs were of two different cultures. God grant us sense enough not to further confuse them with just "our ways." A mere taste of another way of life can be very frustrating.

At mid-morning the visitors began coming again. Our efforts at conversation were futile, but a little show-off boy helped matters immensely. We all had something in common laughing at him. Mildred liked arithmetic and applied herself to her self-appointed task of counting people. As many as thirty crowded into the room at one time.

Suddenly a mother with a round pleasant face spoke up. "Why don't you play for us? We're lonesome."

Her distinct pronunciation startled us and we instantly knew she had not grown up in our village. We later learned that Elena was an Eskimo who had lived in McGrath before

she married a Nikolai man. We made mental note that we would use her as interpreter when necessary, a position she later filled willingly and capably. As Elena had seen my accordion the day before, she wanted to hear me play, so I lifted the instrument from its case and fingered several songs and marches. Not being a planned recital with obligation to stay to the finish, the group began to thin out when they had heard enough. I put the accordion away and we sat in silence again.

"How long does this go on?" Mildred whispered.

"Well, if we leave, they'll have to leave. Let's go visit that cabin where there is supposed to be a sick woman."

Walking down the trail to the Dennis cabin we felt timid and uncertain, as fearful of doing the socially incorrect as if we were entering the queen's court. No one ever knocked at our door, but we agreed it would be well never to begin barging into other homes without invitation. Stopping at the Dennis door, I rapped. No answer. Mildred was less hesitant and stepped ahead to give the knob a rattle not to be mistaken for the noise of children playing on the floor.

"Onee," called a voice from within.

Whatever that meant, it did not sound like "go away." We opened the door and stepped into the one-room cabin. A quick glance showed it much like our own though more crowded if that could be. Long eaves overshadowing the two small windows rationed the light to half of what was needed. Several bed rolls and sleeping bags were tossed in the corners and the one real bed was occupied by a woman whose strained features spelled pain. Her hair was neatly combed with a center part; her skin was clean and too white. She was friendly, chuckling at herself for calling to her visitors in a language they did not understand.

"Onee. Come here," she explained. Turning to her three-year-old son she added, "Skook. Son."

We appreciated her trying to teach us a few words of Indian and repeated the words after her. She smiled at us and repeated the words again and again until she was satisfied with our accent. Then she stopped us with, "I no talk you."

Mildred looked at me, obviously as taken back by that as I was. Then Mrs. Dennis clarified her statement. "I no talk. You no hear me."

So that was it. We both tried to answer at once. "Yes, we hear you. You talk good."

Mrs. Dennis would not be convinced. Her only reply was a friendly smile. She was probably tired and we felt it best not to overdo at our first call. We hesitantly turned to go, then stopped. She needed more than bits of conversation. Stepping closer to her bedside, we paused to offer a simple prayer. Our words were few and it is doubtful that she understood them. That did not matter. The presence of God is not confined to words, and we felt a strength in knowing God was there.

Walking home through the shadows of the late afternoon, we became aware of a handful of children following. Shy women poked their heads out of tent openings and quickly drew in. Perhaps they were trying to muster courage to join the troop of youngsters on their way to the teacherage. Within minutes they had found others to pair up with for moral support and our home again looked as it did the evening before and would look most of the time for months to come.

The waking of new day brought a beautiful scene. A clean blanket of snow lay over the village and I was thrilled.

"Snow! Now I feel like we're really Alaskans. I can hardly wait to go outdoors."

Nick was in extra early to tell us it was snowing, but he was hours late to be the herald of the news. Though he was sure the new teachers would be pleased, he apparently saw no need for me to be completely in the clouds. The only ones who shared my joy were dogs lunging at their chains or standing on their houses making talking sounds as if begging to be taken out on the trail.

Mildred was matter-of-fact. "You'll be sick of it before spring."

I had to admit that likely would be my story, but I might as well enjoy the snow while I could. While mixing and kneading bread dough, I chattered about how I would have to tell about the snow when I wrote home. By the time I got the dough off my hands, however, the sun was up and the snow was gone. The ground was already dampish-dry when we "census takers" set out to make our round of the village.

We needed the names and approximate ages of children who were to enroll in school. We had quite a time as we had to make up our own spelling for some of the names. We also had to tactfully weed out all the children under six. Our final count of prospective pupils was only twelve, but that was enough to start. We knew that within weeks the enrollment would be doubled when Big River and Telida villagers brought their children.

Though not teachers by vocation, teach we must. There were not more than three people in the village, if that many, who understood enough English to grasp the simple Bible stories that Sunday school teachers at home know well. Our conversations, if they could rightly be called that, were a monotonous grind of weather, trapping, and woodcutting. Wherever the Gospel message goes people should be bettered by it spiritually, mentally, and physically.

If Nikolai needed a school, to establish one was our duty.

No, not duty. Let me call it a tremendous experience, a beautiful opportunity.

School began the following morning. Waking early, we had our breakfast before the people began coming. Nick was on hand to saw up a log for seats for the younger children who would be using boxes for desks. The older class was to be seated around the table.

At nine-thirty Mildred picked up the hammer and beat on an oil drum outside the door calling children to their classes. That was rather an unnecessary motion as our pupils had been in the schoolroom and pretty much under our feet for quite a while. Nevertheless, we knew that the first day was the day to start with something resembling a schedule. Along with the youngsters, ages six to eighteen, came a number of parents. The school was wonderfully new to all of them, to all but one who looked on with a superior air. He knew about schools already. Once he had stood in the doorway of the McGrath school.

We divided the children into two classes. Mildred took the six older ones, seating them around the large table near the windows. She passed out papers on which she had printed the alphabet. Imagine her delight when she discovered they all knew their A B C's, even if they did not know where to go from there. Nick leaned over his sister's shoulder, painstakingly reading each letter aloud. Yes, he knew them too. A trapper had helped him once. Read? "No, I can't that kind."

Mildred came to the happy conclusion that perhaps it was going to be fairly simple to teach her class if she could get them to talk. She pointed to a chair. "What is this?"

No one answered. Two children at once began talking in Indian to the pupils after which one ventured in a trembling voice, "Chair."

"What is this?"

No response.

"This is eraser. E-ra-ser. When you make bad mark like this," she demonstrated, "then you erase it. Erase means rub out. All gone."

A chuckle skipped from one to another as each in turn experimented with his eraser and the new word. Mildred soon had all her class laboriously copying the alphabet as she went around the table asking each to say the letters for her. Elena's eyes sparkled as she watched her daughter make letters like the teacher's. The baby riding in a blanket on his mother's back began to fuss. She shifted his blanket, but his whimpering continued. Another child cried aloud from fright. A group of men stood in the corner talking. Ours was anything but a classroom atmosphere.

Almost noon. For Mildred the morning had gone by quickly with her pupils responding. Now that she came to think of it, she was hungry. Her class could go.

"Go home. Time to eat. Come back one o'clock. This time," moving the hands of the clock to make sure she was understood. Hesitantly Eman pushed his box away from the table and stood to his feet. When Mildred nodded her assent, the others followed him out of the room.

In the meantime, I had seated my children on logs at individual desks. The desks were gas boxes we had salvaged from around the village, covering the tops with brown wrapping paper to afford a clean writing surface. My entire forenoon had gone in trying to teach my little ones how to sit at their box desks, for seldom did they sit on anything but the floor. To their tastes, pencils were to suck on, rather than to use for writing. However, after calling on Mrs. Second Chief to help me, we managed to get them started copying the alphabet. Wrong approach entirely! Having never played with crayons and pencils as the average stateside child has, their muscles lacked coordination. Copy

work was at a four-year-old level. Had not both teacher and pupils been keyed to a pitch of adventure, we would have ground out an almost unbearable morning.

Chief sauntered over to Bella's potato box and said something to her. I glanced up from my task of guiding Helen's hand to see Bella leave her work and summon her classmates to follow her. Noon already? I straightened my tired back, walked over to where Mildred stood, and together we watched the people separate to their own homes.

This was no time to gaze out the window. Having a limited supply of paper, we decided to make new lessons on the backs of the old ones. Realizing more than ever that a speaking knowledge of English would have to be the basis of our work, we started making flash cards. We spotted a Sears catalog in the trader's stuff and promptly confiscated it for public use. We cut out pictures of objects familiar to our people: table, gun, book, shoe, axe, house, and so on. We pasted each on a square of heavier paper with the name of each object printed in large plain letters beneath. After school we continued our project, adding to it a few letters from the alphabet for the front of the room. It was of little use, but 'way back when we went to school there was always the alphabet across the front of the room and we couldn't get it out of our heads. We were stubbornly determined our school should look schoolish. With an ever-present audience handling our work and commenting upon it in their own language, we made slow progress. We knew, however, that this association was an excellent foundation for later work with the adults. Our task stretched itself out over many evenings as we thought of new words to add to the stack of cards.

From flash cards we branched into making books for Mildred's class. The sentences were brief and pertained to

village life. Typical sentences were, "Chief went to his trapline," or "Eman made a new sled." Many were the hours that Mildred's pupils spent working their way through the typewritten pages, taking them home to read to delighted families. The books were used till they literally fell apart.

The homemade material, based upon life as the villagers knew it, was far more valuable than any beginners' books which could have been purchased for the first few months of our infant school, although the work would have been considerably lessened had we brought more paper, crayons, and modeling clay. Why we ever started with so meager a supply, I will never know. As for our ignorance of classroom techniques, that was an asset. Because of it, we were enthusiasm itself, for had there been any premonition of the long, long road ahead we perhaps never would have begun. No method in the books would have been the answer to Nikolai problems. Learning with our children kept the pace down. Our learning processes were so akin to theirs as to give us ground for understanding.

I plodded along teaching my class that could in no way compare with Mildred's up-and-coming class. My children were absolutely unconcerned with education and could relax at school as well as at home. Stamped indelibly on my mind is Iltotts, my round faced six-year-old with boots too big. Assignments meant nothing to her as she sat, hands folded against her stomach, feet on her desk, and her face wearing the satisfied look of a businessman who had just completed an important transaction. Truth was, she had not even begun.

The children loved to look at pictures and flash cards, but several days went by before I could get across the idea that they should repeat words after me. When they finally understood that they were to copy me, there seemed to be no stopping them. For change of position, I led them to the

front of the room to say the first three letters of the alphabet. These cherubs did beautifully, and I was careful not to overdo the privilege of marching to the front of the room.

After a minute or two I told them to sit down.

"Sit down," they chorused, keeping their toes squarely on the chalk line.

My elated balloon was rapidly losing air. This was a new one. Venturing the instruction again, I got exactly the same echo. I walked over by the shelves where Mrs. Second Chief stood solemnly viewing my plight. She taught this baffled teacher to say "Ziddaw" and with that my pupils went obediently to their logs and sat down. The first few days of this had its humorous side, but hours of parrotry began to wear on my nerves.

"What is this?"

"What is this?"

"No, you tell me."

"No, you tell me."

After all, there was a limit to how much repetition I wanted. Mildred's class was learning with amazing rapidity. My children were younger and could not understand English. I reminded myself of that fact over and over again, but wanted to see progress and was disappointed. Once the youngsters did not know how to repeat my words; now they were perfect little mimics.

That was funny, yes, real funny. After a couple of weeks of it, I couldn't crack a smile. Here I was going to be a teacher, imparting of a vast store of knowledge to eager children who would grasp every word. Grasp my every word? They spit the words right back at me. Woman-like, I excused myself and went into our room for a drink of water. Out of their sight, I stood in the middle of the floor and bawled. Then I dried my tears, blew my nose, got a drink of water, and returned. I felt better.

Like a flash I saw it. They were learning after all. Of course they were! They could say the letter "V" now and it used to sound like "B". Carefully pronouncing each word, mouths open wide, they looked for all the world like birds or hungry goldfish about to receive a few morsels. Suddenly I felt mischievous.

Needing to snap myself out of the discouragement that had overtaken me, I said slowly and distinctly, "I am small fry."

They chorused with equal precision, "I am small fry."

Mildred overheard and turned her face toward the window. For our school to ever think itself the object of our amusement would be the undoing of all our work. Then the day went quickly. My small fry were darlings, and they were learning.

THREE :- Together We Learn

WHILE THE CHILDREN were learning the rudiments of the three R's, we teachers were learning something of the ways of the Northland. After-school hours often found us in the homes of the villagers encouraging the adults to speak English. Most of the time, little response. At first the silence was awkward and embarrassing, but after a while we became accustomed to their habit of ignoring us. Without saying a word, we sat on boxes and looked. We never looked anywhere in particular. If our hostess had no boxes to spare, we sat cross-legged on the floor. In fact, the latter was not only socially correct, but was also quite comfortable if we were on a tent floor covered with spruce bough. After ten or fifteen minutes, we would decide to try another home. With "Good-by, we see you again," we hunched through the doorway and single-filed to another dwelling.

Half of our people lived in tents, plain canvas tents, patches where windows had been cut out during the summer months. They appeared rather picturesque at night with the lighted lantern inside showing up the seams and stitching while the shadows of the people within moved weirdly against the walls. For everyday living, highly impractical; they heated quickly but they cooled just as quickly when the tent flap was opened. Most of the tents were only about eight by ten, consequently close and crowded. In the corner would be a thin sheet metal camp stove. When the fire was low, it gave out practically no heat. When the fire was hot, it was a hazard and tent fires were not uncommon.

Before the coming of the white man, the Indians made their tents of heavy moosehide and an open fire took the place of today's flimsy camp stoves. An old villager told me the people were not sickly when they lived in tents and blamed the present poor health on the cabins. He was partially right in that living in their moosehide tents and moving whenever the floor needed sweeping meant they moved from filth and germs. If someone died in a tent, the family moved. This was certainly more effective than fumigation. Poorly ventilated cabins are much to blame for the white plague that haunts our Northern villages. Canvas tents, however, are far worse. Often I have sat on a tent floor by the stove feeling like the moon with one side of me burning hot and the other side freezing.

Like their neighbors, the Skogomy family lived in a small tent. Mr. Skogomy, a thin man with a long face and too light a skin, was tubercular and unable to work. His family of five children lived meagerly and without the ingenuity of Mrs. Skogomy they would have lived hopelessly. She was a hardworking woman whose work never ruled her. She did what she could, and what she could not do was left without fretting. She certainly did the best anyone could have done with what she had, and that next to nothing. We often stopped at that home because she was such a boost to our morale. Mrs. Skogomy never objected to our inquiries about village affairs. We learned to depend upon her answers as she had a clear memory and a fairly unprejudiced mind. If we suspected we were not being told the complete truth about which children belonged in certain families, we went to her to get the records straightened. She in turn was always eager to ask questions about the states, known to Alaskans as "outside." She was equally interested in her immediate surroundings.

She showed us a dress. "What this kind?"

"That kind of cotton. Grow on plants. They make cotton into thread. Make cloth from cotton thread."

"This kind same. No?" as she held up her blue sweater.

"No, not same kind. Wool. Wool come from sheep."

"That what I think too. I ask you."

"Yes, you ask us and you learn. Then we ask you how you fix moosehide, how you make slippers. We learn. You learn, we learn. Both learn."

"Yes," she laughed. "Both learn."

One afternoon Mrs. Skogomy pleased us by announcing, "You best teachers in world. My girls say that." She made her announcement with all the finality of an authority. We were well aware that there was no one to run competition. But Mrs. Skogomy was sincere in her praise and we frankly liked it. She was one person who gave us a definite feeling of belonging and helped us to call Nikolai home.

Weeks went by and we finally had to admit that our living quarters needed a face-lift. We knew it all the time, but other things had mattered more. Now was the time to start doing something about our walls. A package of small household nails initiated the winter-long task of card-boarding the walls whenever a box was available for that purpose. We were not able to make a smooth finish over the rough logs. Some of the boxes used were cleaner on the outside than on the inside so we had to tolerate some printing and the inevitable "this side up" arrow pointing down.

For all that, the drab wallpapering was worth the hours it cost. Not only was our room cleaner, but a heavy layer of cardboard has remarkable insulating qualities.

One evening several men gathered to make desks for our school. If you ever need them, gas boxes sawed in half and set on four legs make fair desks. Having individual desks solved a problem for Mildred because ever since spelling began children have been tempted to look on another's paper.

Nikolai boys and girls were no exception. They were as normal as any group of children and even the teen-agers went through the various stages of development that any other group of first graders goes through. The only noticeable difference was that they did not linger as long in each stage.

For all our efforts, the schoolroom never acquired an appearance suggestive of the halls of education. The long shelves jammed with teapots and stale breakfast foods annoyed us. Most annoying was the picture of the Russian general taken from the cover of a *Life* magazine and nailed to the door. We dared not remove him as our people almost worshipped him. Though they did not understand the Russian language, they sang Russian songs in the church, songs they had learned by rote and sang beautifully. To them there was a connection between this man and their songs, and we did not know how to explain the connection that wasn't. Awkward! You think you'll explain and wave your arms and tell them about communism. You won't say anything — you don't know how.

Then there were knitting classes. From our supply of yarn, we gave to the older girls to knit wool socks. Two of them surprised their would-be teacher by already knowing how to knit. The story was finally woven together of how a woman who used to live in Nikolai learned to knit by watching other women who went through on the mail run. Night after night we grouped between the two stoves, the clicking of our needles replacing the usual homey chat of a sewing circle.

The boys were not to be outdone. If the girls came several evenings a week and stayed till ten o'clock, they should be likewise privileged. The time planned for ourselves was taken. Attempts at letter writing, and broad hints about how much we had to do, fell unheeded. The lads had

nothing to do and the fact that they felt utterly neglected meant we could hardly ignore their presence. The boys had nothing to say, neither did they choose to answer questions, simple questions that would have required only one-word answers.

In desperation Mildred latched on the bright idea of a bean bag. I nodded agreement and in a few minutes she had one made. At least it would break the silence. For the first two weeks of the game we didn't mind having to play with Nick and his buddies. By the time the knitting classes were discontinued, we were looking for weak spots in the bean bag material. Wouldn't you get tired of bean bags? We might as well have tried putting a stop to the World Series. Round and round the bag flew in a dull rhythm disrupted only now and then when a poor shot sailed against the window or under the stove. The boys would chuckle, then round and round again. We knew it couldn't last forever, or could it? Fortunately the bean bag wore out. We made its end sure, burning the remains and vowing never to let ourselves in for its like again.

Being with our people and they with us eighteen hours a day was telling on us. We wanted to be alone at least for our meals. Many were the nights when, after having locked both door and outer schoolroom door, we would hear a pounding and would have to get up to answer. Who was it? A group of small children out for the lark of it. There had been no schedule in their lives. They could go to bed and get up whenever they pleased and the adults were no example. Some of them reversed the usual pattern of daylight and dark, retiring before sundown and getting up at two in the morning. Trying to keep up had slowed us down to a drag while our pupils frequently tried to snatch a few winks of sleep in class. Something had to be done. We decided to

effect an eight-thirty curfew at our cabin for children under twelve.

Our bright idea got more response than we had counted on. The morning following its inauguration brought a group of irate mothers.

"What you do? Make children go home?"

The offended youngsters clutched the more tightly to their mothers' skirts and stared with a look of triumphant fright. The little squeelers had us in a corner and they knew it. For a moment both Mildred and I were too dumbfounded to speak. Then Mildred slowly chopped out our side of the story. "Late. We get tired. Children here all time. We get no sleep. We like children. We have them all day. But night they must sleep. No sleep, too tired. We tired, children tired. Can't learn. We all need sleep."

The tide changed. With a sudden outburst of native scolding that we did not understand, the children were sent scurrying out the door while the mothers stayed to show themselves friendly again. We had a batch of near-angels all day and a quiet evening to top it, after that.

"—And now we bring you Tundra Topics—," and we laid our work aside. Following specific instructions from McGrath friends, we had acquired the Tundra Topics habit and it became as much a nightly ritual as winding the clock. A number of our people were also listening, but we had learned to be cautious about accepting their interpretations of messages. Once an incident was related of a man who had *broken his leg*. Someone came and excitedly told us the man had *shot his wife*. At any rate, our long-awaited message came, our freight had come from the states and was at The Landing.

How to get the freight the last thirty miles up river was the question. After explaining our problem to Second Chief, the village men held a conference. They came back with

word that Miska Alexie had offered to go for us. Alexie was young and strong and easy-going. A lot of jobs were dumped into his lap. We had a hunch his volunteering was of a compulsory sort, but we accepted his going without questioning. As Second Chief put it, "She has lots kids in school." Alexie was the logical person to be chosen.

As it was nearing the end of October, the ice was forming in the river and huge cakes were floating down with the current. The smaller ones jammed in swirling masses that made you dizzy as you watched. By the minute, the river channel was becoming narrower. Freeze-up, the river completely covered with ice, was a matter of hours.

Morning crept in cold and cruel. Alexie left while the light was still gray, hoping to make it back to Nikolai by the middle of the afternoon. We were apprehensive when we learned he had gone alone. His was a dangerous trip in an open boat with no one to help should an emergency arise.

At the time he was to return, there was no sign of Alexie and his boat. Night came and we could no longer see the river from our cabin window. Villagers gathered in our room to wait. Freezing to death was a figure of speech when we lived in California, but looking into the solemn faces of these Alaskans, we caught its real meaning. Here it happened to men! We listened for the sound of Alexie's boat. After a time keener listeners insisted they heard it. Finally we, too, were able to identify it through distracting sounds that came between, draft scooting up the stove pipe and gentle shuffle of slippered feet on a rough floor. At times the putt-putting of the motor would fade away with a change in wind, or it may have been that the motor stalled momentarily. Immediately the soft native talk would cease until again we heard that muffled strain and knew that the boat was not yet permanently pinned between churning ice.

Another hour would do it! Then—and we'll never forget

—the motor stopped completely. Eyes widened with fright as each looked to another. In that tense moment it would have been a crime to talk. Minutes were long — two, three, four, five—don't remember. I thought about my jacket mixed up somewhere with the rest of the freight, now terribly unimportant. The things we had insisted we needed became as nothing. I thought of Alexie's children and they were all that mattered.

Elene's Eskimo face was like a barometer. Across it came the faintest suggestion of a smile. Her ears trained to the out-of-doors, had caught what we had missed—Alexie's motor had started. After a bit we could hear it, faintly at first then louder as the wind kindly picked up the sound and carried it to us. It didn't mean the battle was won, but it did tell us that it was not altogether lost. It was late when Alexie arrived, the picture of exhaustion as he stumbled into our cabin. His brown parka ruff was heavy with frost from the moisture of his breath, his stooped shoulders and staggering walk unlike the man we knew. I got a crazy lump in my throat. I wanted to cry, but instead I laughed. He was alive.

The next day we saw him down by the river chopping his boat out of the ice. There was not a sign of running water in the south fork of the Kuskokwim. It was frozen all the way across.

It was October and winter had come. Mukluks are the wintertime footwear of the Alaskans of the interior. Mukluk telegraph must have carried the story of our village and its latest endeavor, for besides the boxes we were looking for came a large wooden box from the Alaska Native Service at Bethel. It contained a generous donation of paper and books for our school. Such a commotion in our cabin! Our people who could not read could certainly admire colorful book bindings. Mildred's pupils reached excitedly for primers and sought out words they knew. She set out the books she

wanted for her class while I looked on longingly. She had a lot of books my small fry could not understand so I became greedy in sorting paper and pencils. We never did find out exactly how the school at Bethel knew about our work, but we do know that we could not have made it through the school year without the material they sent. Our letter of appreciation, though I tried my best to word it, never adequately expressed what their help meant.

We knew we had a lively day ahead with real school supplies besides color books and "candle pencils" (crayons) sent by our families in the States. I had packed a small blackboard and a folding easel among my things and unearthing them was just like a new find. We could hardly wait to have our classes try out the blackboard. Not only were we grateful for teaching aids, but we were eager to see the children's first reactions to the things we had for them.

The following morning we hurried through opening exercises and Mildred took the lead. "Blackboard. Black and board. Say blackboard."

Muffled whispers went around the room as the children carefully tried to form the words. Then Eman bravely boomed out, "Blackboard!" to the amazement of all of us. Others cleared their throats and dared to speak more loudly, "Blackboard. Blackboard." Mildred printed the word for her class to read. With a quick wipe of cloth, she erased it. The children giggled. Each had his turn writing with chalk, down to the youngest who could only make a mark of no meaning. By this time a group of adults who had sensed there might be something new to see had gathered in the room, laughing hilariously with the very last child who tried the blackboard.

They glanced timidly at Mildred who offered the chalk. "You like to write? Take chalk. You write."

No one moved.

Finally our faithful Nick called attention to himself by speaking up, "No, not me. I won't try," whereupon Mildred shoved the chalk into his open hand. After that all the adults who wandered in during the day had the privilege of making marks on the new board and erasing them. Reactions were all the same. Battery radios and hand-operated sewing machines they had at home, but this beat all.

Teaching nouns was among our lesser problems. I began building a small Alaskan vocabulary to enable me to give the younger children a word in both languages to avoid misunderstandings. Mrs. Second Chief taught me to say "Yadajoneh," which is supposed to mean "What is that?" I think that is what it means. At any rate, I always got an answer. Most of the time the answers were a help, but sometimes they added to the confusion. If I pointed to a bird and said "Yadajoneh," I naturally accepted the reply as meaning "bird." What I would sometimes forget is that it could mean "sparrow" or "snowbird." More than once the children would shake their heads and laugh, "No. No." I never would find out what was funny.

I thought I should write a paper on how to teach verbs in one easy lesson. The one step would be, *act them out*. To teach the word "jump," there are no other words that can explain it like the action. Never mind feeling graceful, jump! A picture of a boy jumping could be confused with "*boy*," and certainly he should not be jumping over a candlestick for then j-u-m-p might spell "candle." I had pantomimed the important action verbs until boys and girls became used to my antics and wanted to try. I almost regretted the day I finally persuaded one chubby little girl to act.

"Walk," and Iltoots took off across the room at high speed on one foot. Mildred's class laughed at the child's comical

posture. I could but compliment her on a good try. If it be true that adults see themselves in children,—forget it.

The action choruses popular in vacation Bible schools and Sunday schools elsewhere were invaluable in our school for language instruction. We used them every day. The catchy tunes together with simple words and motions were a perfect combination. Many of the songs led into stories and occasionally we would get out a flannel scene to lay against the back side of the blackboard. One of us pointed to the trees, houses, or road, explaining each picture in detail. If the story called for a man walking up a road, we moved the cutout of a man along the flannel road. Our characters were backed with flannel and stayed where they were unless, of course, someone opened the door.

We sincerely doubted that even Mildred's class understood the stories, but they seemed to enjoy them. We began giving a Bible story every Friday. The adults heard about it and came to take part in both action and listening. Listening they showed no response whatever and we often wondered if our efforts were premature. Several weeks passed, and the people continued to attend "Story," as they called it. Those in school already had their seats and a shortage of boxes meant that anyone else get along as best he could. Mothers seated themselves on the floor and the men had a habit of congregating on the corner woodpile.

One afternoon Mildred told the story of the prodigal son. She spoke slowly, "He went far away. Far away. He not think about home. Have good time. He drink. Have lots friends. He have lots money—." A gust of wind blew through the room as a latecomer entered. All eyes turned toward him for an instant, then again it was quiet as she progressed with the story of a young man who came to himself and returned to his father's house. We heard a low murmuring from the woodpile. I glanced toward the men seated there

and saw on a couple of faces a slight expression that meant they might have grasped a fraction of what she said. In Nikolai, where we were never certain of being understood, little things became proportionately great. A half smile across a usually sullen face was taken for a milestone of progress.

This incident and others similar were nothing to write home about, but when evenings were long, our people slow to catch on, and we in our way even slower, we would remind each other that once in "Story" someone had looked as if he knew what we were trying to say.

FOUR -:- The Social Event of the Season

LOOKS AS IF OUR WATER BOYS — water girls would be more like it — have forgotten us,” remarked Mildred as she tipped the empty water pails.

“Which happens every now and then,” I added. I lifted my plaid jacket off a nail and tied a wool scarf over my ears. I wasn’t exactly eager-beaver about an early morning trek to the river, yet we could not wait indefinitely for a helper to appear. With mittens, hatchet, and water pails, I stepped out to forty degrees below.

Practically tumbling down the bank to the river, I made my way through the snow to a water hole. Though the river ice was about three feet thick, I figured I could dip from the community water hole. I got down on my knees and began hacking away at the ice which had formed over it during the night. One of the flying chips appeared discolored and curiosity demanded I give closer examination. Don’t ask how it got there, but the object was the tip of some animal’s tail frozen fast in the ice. Mechanically chopping away again, I was wondering who lost his tail and whether it hurt when my lazy thoughts shifted to Olin coming toward me with a long-handled ice pick. Olin, who was in Mildred’s class, was an attractive girl in her late teens. Neither Mildred nor I ever felt we did justice to getting acquainted with her. She held herself with a reserve that almost seemed to resent any friendliness.

“Hi!” I called.

Olin smiled, a smile that both surprised and delighted me.

Then as it came, it disappeared and I saw the same sober Olin we knew in the classroom. I made a weak effort at conversation, but it was too one-sided to be any fun so gave up.

I quickly got myself out of the way to let her work. In a few minutes she had made a clear opening from which we could dip our water and by that time I was almost numb. I was wiser, too, having learned that a tommy-ax might do for re-opening a hole in the middle of the day, but it was hardly the tool to use in the early morning when the new layer was thick.

When our pails were filled, I saw Olin take a quicker route up the bank and I followed, for I wanted to talk. I was panting too hard to get out any words. She was fifteen feet ahead. There is a trick to walking in the snow and I definitely did not have it. If I could just get to her, I would break down her reserve. I would—.

We came to a fork in the trail, Olin went her way, and I mine. She never knew that the white teacher was a stranger and longed for friendship. Staggering into our cabin with the pails, I discovered they were quite attached to me. Some of the water had spilled and my skirt was frozen fast to them. As I peeled off the ice, I couldn't help but scold myself aloud for not wearing ski pants.

Mildred took the chore of lifting the pails onto the stove where the ice would melt from the outsides before placing them on the washstand. I had to tell her about Olin coming to my rescue with an ice pick. Almost every time I went for water, a girl was also getting water, seldom the boys. If Chief sent someone to cut wood for us, he usually sent girls. The night before when a group came to saw wood for the school, we invited them in for tea afterward. Our workers were five girls.

In some instances the poverty of the village would not

have been as extreme as it was if those concerned showed more ambition. We were beginning to think it part of our business to prod them a bit. We talked about it, but we never did too much about it. We were not that sure of ourselves. We needed to be careful lest we give in to a dangerous tendency on the part of leaders of attempting to remake others into their pattern. Our natives were not ambitious even in the general sense, but they never suffered from our stateside variety of nerves. They had their faults, but, giving them due credit, their slow mode of living does have its good points. Somewhere between them and us lies a happy medium.

We were discussing the needs of the village and making plans to write to our Women's Missionary Councils in the States for used clothing when Bettescovia, Mrs. Second Chief's daughter, entered the room. She had been out making her early morning round of the village.

"You see everyone?"

"Yes."

"Everyone all right?"

"Yes." Bettescovia coughed a dry, hollow cough and sat down by the stove, fingering her long hair that curled softly about her shoulders. Her hair was naturally straight, but she put it up with strips of tin cut from coffee cans. Vanity will make a way.

Bettescovia looked absently toward her home, the tent next to our cabin. No smoke rose from the stovepipe since her parents had gone to their trapline. Placed in our care we enjoyed having their fifteen-year-old with us. Bettescovia understood some English and could answer in one or two words, but that was all she would attempt. Little wonder she often sauntered to her cousin's tent to spend an hour or two. Bettescovia could do no work. She was a sick girl with tuberculosis and a crippled back, apparently caused

by a fall in early childhood. It was unwise to have her living with us, from the standpoint of health. We did the best we could to avoid unnecessary contact. That only meant washing her dishes separately as further precautions would not have been to any advantage. She should not have been in a public school, but we had no way of determining exactly how many children had tuberculosis. Since no extra care was exercised in their homes, segregation would be of advantage neither to them nor to us. We honestly did not know how to cope with the health problem.

Not knowing what else to do, we went merrily ahead. Sick or well, all the children would come to our party. We had tried to explain parties to the youngsters who saw pictures of them in books, but they did not "savvy." (Mexican up there!) If they knew what they were reading about, party stories might have an appeal. A party they must have. We who had been to many enjoyed the preparations, thinking how pleased our children would be with their favors. In secret we had made little paper baskets with a few pieces of candy in each. The small fry could drink water as we had no cool-aid in our cupboard. The older children could have tea and then we would serve jello with a cake Mildred had made. It was our first cake since coming to the village.

Before school was dismissed, Mildred made an announcement. "Tonight school party. When you hear bell, come back to school. We play games and eat."

Her simple explanation brought all the children when the "bell" sounded at six-thirty. Mildred and I wore new beaded ornaments and Bettescovia put a paper ribbon in her hair. We were the only ones who even pretended to dress up for the social event. I watched my class as they straggled in wearing the same clothes they had worn all week, most of them with hair uncombed and snarled. My big boy looked the worst. Had he changed his shirt in a month? At first

the children's untidiness somewhat disillusioned us, but our disappointment was soon swallowed in the games that followed. After all, we did not tell them to dress up and they were having fun. The party became rough and noisy with the game of musical chairs, and hilarious with "Here we go round the mulberry bush," winding up with "This is the way we pet our dog." I could clearly distinguish several native voices. Ah, progress!

Afterward we led the youngsters into our room where the table was set attractively with a colorful cake in the center. They were not at all timid about eating, in fact, they were absolutely uninhibited, helping themselves to anything they wanted. They talked softly among themselves and we had no idea what they were saying. Judging from appearances, they were happy. I was amazed to see them completely at ease. The blue book of etiquette had never been thrown at them, consequently they were unaware and unafraid of it. We hoped we would not teach them so well that their confidence and self-assurance would be destroyed.

By the middle of November, the village had doubled. Several families had moved in from the fish camps so the children could have the advantages of school.

The Deaphan family from Big River came bringing Kathryn, (the eighteen-year-old who had impressed us with her eagerness to learn) and her younger brother and sister. Their parents had passed away some years before and their aunt and uncle, the Deaphans, were caring for them. Kathryn and Damoska were in Mildred's class. Little Mary came into my class and I was more than pleased to have her. With her and Agnesa, a thirteen-year-old whose gentle smile captured my heart, added to my class, I had the grand total of three with combed hair every morning. The latest arrivals in school had some discipline in their homes, too, and I never had to correct them for spitting on the floor. A relief!

I was reminded of the noon hour when I had blurted out, "Do you know what happened on my side this morning?"

Mildred stopped me sharply with "Don't you tell me." You spoil my lunch every day with one of your stories of what goes on in your class!"

My face flushed and I wanted to reply but did not. An isolated Alaskan village was no place for a silly argument. Again I reminded myself that the children were learning about living with certain episodes week after week.

When we felt our school was well under way, we started evening classes for the adults. Someone called it Old Timer's School and the name stuck. The number attending varied with weather and with trapping, but there were never less than six and not infrequently as many as twenty. We concentrated on reading and writing. We had a few arithmetic classes, but those were pointless. The women were not interested, and the men had their own time-proven methods. They could add or multiply large figures in their heads. They tried to tell us how to do it, but we had difficulty catching on. That worked both ways so we gave up. As long as they came out with the correct answers, who were we to tell them their method was wrong?

Some of the adult readers started out full speed, having already learned the alphabet and words off cans or boxes such as tea, rice, and sugar. These alert ones also took advantage of their children's school papers. As in day sessions, we grouped the pupils into two classes. Mildred took those who were ready to start with primers while I had the beginners. At least they knew to turn a page when told and if they didn't, they watched their neighbors and learned what to do.

Andrew Dennis was my star pupil. Not every person is willing at sixty years of age to tackle something new. He did. He sometimes got sleepy in class and napped, or took off

his moosehide moccasins under the table and started home without them. He did a beautiful job with home study. The crowning evening came when, all by himself, he spelled out and pronounced "Bobby Squirrel." With the triumph of a world-conqueror and a chuckle that tickled the whole room, he turned to those around him and announced, "Bobby Squirrel. That Bobby Squirrel. Yah? I read that." Old Andrew had learned to read.

From then on Mildred and I began to unlearn our language. We had to talk like our people to be understood and in due time what had always been the accepted in grammar became the ridiculous. Tense did not count. If you fall, you fall, whether it be yesterday, today, or tomorrow. E's and A's are synonymous in some of the Alaskan dialects and this was true of our village. A beginner often copied "Alaska" as "Eleske" and the boy "Eman" was, to the utter amazement of his teachers, "Amen."

We recruited both young and old for our schools. By this time nearly every cabin had people living in it, but we looked for one more person. The little old woman who lived in the middle of the village and could not understand one word of English was not there. We had heard about her in McGrath and elsewhere. The unique description stayed with us and we asked about her, the bent old woman who lived all alone. No one seemed to know of whom we were talking or perhaps they did not want to answer. We had met the elderly Esai couple, but they understood some English and a couple was not one person. No, there was no one to answer her description. In the center of the village was a small house with a sod roof, the grass growing high on it during the summer. We wondered if that were her home. One day surely a team would come, as other dog teams had come; it would bring someone to live there.

We were right, I mean I thought we were. One day after

school when we had already visited a number of homes, we saw smoke coming out of the chimney of the hut. Surely the old lady had come at last and we had been looking forward to meeting her. The window at the back, the only window, was too dirty to see through, but that meant nothing. There were other darkish windows in the village.

"Let's knock at the door. Smoke is coming out of the chimney. The woman must be home at last. Maybe we can't say anything, but we can look friendly," I coaxed.

Mildred was tired and replied, "No. We'll go home. We don't need to go there today."

I was disappointed. Tomorrow would be another day and I would have something to look forward to. I just knew I was going to like that old woman.

Nick came in that evening for one of his long sessions of sticking around and saying little. I was still interested in the woman so I asked about her. Nick shook his head. He didn't know of any little old woman who had just come. That was like Nick, pleading ignorance when he did not want to give information.

"Look, Nick, little house over there. Smoke come out, first time since we come here. Who lives there?"

Nick's face lit up with a merry smile, then deadpan again, "That bath house I think."

Nick was telling the truth. To think that the men had gathered at the little house for a steam bath!

To this day the woman has never come. Obviously the old woman never existed. Probably the villagers had more than one good laugh behind our backs.

Contact with "our world" meant much to us. Any team going to The Landing knew to bring our mail and parcel post. Often remembering relatives and friends sent us something choice to eat, otherwise our diet seldom varied from moosemeat and dehydrated vegetables. Having no time for

extra cooking, we followed a standing rule — supper's leftovers were combined with packaged soup for the next day's lunch. It was just part of the economy connected with living in the bush.

To add to our initiation, the weather sort of outdid itself. What we had in November and early December was the exception rather than the rule in the Kuskokwim area. For four weeks the mercury spent much of its time at the sixty-below mark and never once worked above forty below. Because of the danger of freezing the dogs' lungs, teams did not travel and no one went to his traplines. The cold was intense, cold that cuts little notches in your nerves and leaves you sort of wondering what happens when there are too many notches. Even the smoke rising from chimneys couldn't wind its way upward as it wanted to; the straight columns, like white temple pillars, went up a short way and stopped. Slowly the smoke spread to form a ceiling over the village. From appearance one could not tell whether these pillars were standing or hanging. It was both beautiful and eerie. The cold was the kind of cold we don't talk about because it doesn't sound like truth. We felt as if the world could never be warmed up again.

One Sunday afternoon a sound broke the stillness as a red and yellow plane circled the village, landing on the lake to the north. It might have landed on the river, practically at our very doors, but no one had snowshoed a runway. When questioned about it, the only reply the villagers gave was that no one knew a plane was coming. I guess that is as good a reason as any, so the plane landed on Strawberry Lake, sans strawberries.

We stood by the window trying to see what was taking place. Our cabin windows were frosted over with the exception of one small section that had a double pane of glass. We took turns peering through it, as we wanted to see who

came back with the team that went to meet the plane. It brought two parka-clad figures who made their way to other cabins for a few minutes, then went back over the trail by which they had come. As the hum of the plane lifting into the air reached our ears, Nick came in.

"Gregory boys from McGrath."

We had heard about the Gregory boys. The oldest one, Pete, was son-in-law to Mrs. Dennis and it was he who had paid for her trip to Fairbanks for medical help the previous summer. Pete was more prosperous than his brother, quicker to adopt white ways, that is, the white ways that are commendable. And, as he said of himself, "I never touch drink when I have furs in my hand." In that verbal package was good advice that some of the others would have done well to have heeded.

Now that Nick was comfortably seated in a chair beside the stove, he did not wish to be bothered. We gave up trying to talk to him and forgot about him. An hour later there came the sound of another plane or, more likely, the same plane returning. At this Nick stirred himself to leave with the explanation that another native was coming. The door banged behind him and we looked at each other. The temperature was considerably below zero and a plane could not be left long without having to be reheated for the take-off. The passengers would not have time to come our way.

Mildred went back to letter writing and I to fudge cooling. Not that the fudge needed help to cool, but I was playing with it. I happened to glance out the window and let out one wild whoop. "O no, it can't be. Mil—"

I was gone, tearing through the schoolroom as fast as I could go. Mildred didn't know what it was all about, but she followed. Coming through the doorway were Dick, Bernice and a pilot. Mildred talked, I chattered. Dick and Bernice rattled off everything they were supposed to tell

us, all in unbridled confusion. The sensible pilot never tried to wedge in a word. On went the coffeepot while Dick dug through his big pockets for our mail.

"We heard a plane was making the trip, so Helen suggested we come along to see how the pioneers were making it."

Dick kept asking whether we were getting along okay and we kept assuring him that we were. They could be with us only fifteen minutes. We talked. We made plans. O the joy of relaxing and rattling off English as fast as tongues could go!

At last the pilot ventured, "You mean you've been here three months without seeing anyone but the Nikolai folks?"

"To the day," was our reply.

He looked at us unbelievably. His look made us think maybe three months was quite a while after all.

They checked their time carefully and when the fifteenth minute was up, they were on their way.

Settling to the task of sorting our mail amid the usual onlookers, Mildred asked, "What did he say about our going to McGrath?"

"I don't remember. I was too excited to know anything. Bernice said something that someone in McGrath had told her to be sure to tell us, too. What was it? O I don't know anything!" And I really didn't.

Not until that Sunday had we realized that we had been completely out of our setting. We were as out of place as a native uprooted from his village, set down in Fairbanks, then told to fend for himself. For anyone, a transition period is trying. We hear a lot about teen-age problems, the native problem of the foreign-born, and of the first generation American. In the final analysis, are not most of the problems one, that of adjustment?

At the other end of the line, the McGrath folk too were

having a time. Neither Dick nor Bernice could tell anyone anything about us or about Nikolai. All they knew was that we seemed to be getting along all right.

"The girls were so excited that we got excited and even the pilot didn't know what to think," and that ended their story.

About two in the morning I spoke. "Mildred?"

"Yes."

"You awake?" (Silly question.)

"Yes, what's the matter? The bed need fixing again?"

During the six weeks that Bettescovia stayed with us, she used my cot and I slept on gas boxes. We lined three of them against the wall, padded them with quilts, and pushed Mildred's bed against them to keep me from rolling off in the night as the boxes were less than a foot wide. Practically every night the boxes parted. I would cling to Mildred's mattress to keep from falling into the gradually widening crack. I would try to keep from breathing to help hold the sorry arrangement together. When my bed reached that stage, there was nothing to do but waken Mildred and together repair it.

Mildred complained that she had not slept a wink, "And I'm glad this went to pieces *before* I finally got to sleep. All I can think of is news from home, or trying to remember what it was they told us. Whatever would we do if we had company more often?"

That was easy to answer. With company more often, our reactions would be less violent. Agreed so we crawled back under the quilts to get our four hours of rest before another busy Monday morning.

Bettescovia moaned in her sleep and somewhere in the crisp, cold outdoors a dog called to the moon. I covered my head and dreamed about the States.

FIVE -:- Out of Darkness into Light

ERHAPS I SHOULD NEVER TELL THIS, but here goes. Bettescovia's parents returned to the village so our boarder moved back to her home. I promptly abandoned the gas-box arrangement for the cot she had been using. It sagged like a hammock and rested on cases of staple goods beneath, but I slept well except for worries. I would waken several times in the night thinking about the sick ones in the village.

Mrs. Dennis was my main concern. When her son-in-law, Pete, sent her to Fairbanks to the doctor, he had sent her back with a letter. After we became better acquainted with the patient, she gave us the letter to read and we learned that she had cancer. We wrote the doctor who answered immediately that he could give no promise of her recovery. Her case was too far advanced for surgery. The one promise he made us was that we could expect her to suffer intensely. Mildred and I kept his secret and wondered what we would do when the worst came.

One still night I heard the heavy cold silence broken by an unfamiliar sound almost as if someone were crying. I held my breath and strained every muscle to hear. Had Mildred wakened? No. Regular breathing across the room told me she was not the least disturbed. Getting up quietly, I slipped my feet into boots, dressed in my housecoat, and tiptoed across the room, through the schoolroom, and out of doors. It was cold, the snow making crunchy, twisty sounds under my feet as I walked in the direction of the Dennis cabin from where the crying was coming.

Nearing their cabin, I could see no light. Only the milky moon cast weird shadows across the white world and I felt a numbness from the severe cold stealing into me, but I had to find out what had happened.

I made my way between cabins, fairly sure that no one would detect my white chenille robe against the colorless background. I was unhappily aware, however, that should a loose dog notice me, mine would be a sorry end. I steeled myself as I drew closer to the mysterious crying. Sure enough, it came from somewhere near Mrs. Dennis' window. Stooping low to listen, I detected that instead of the cries coming from within, they came from under the low eaves of her cabin. Huddled between snowdrifts were the fur-ball forms of three pups. The foolish ones had strayed a few feet from their mother and were whimpering as the sharp air nipped their little noses.

They were big enough to walk back to mama if they really wanted to, so I turned and quickened my pace home feeling absolutely silly. As I opened the door, Mildred sat up staring at me unbelievably. "Where on earth have you been?"

Admitting that my imagination had run away with me, I stammered out my story. Pulling the bulky quilts over me, I was thankful that my deed and the lesson learned had been in twenty-below instead of in sixty-below weather.

The following day, as in days past, we made a soft pudding from powdered eggs and milk and brought it to Mrs. Dennis. Her brown eyes brightened as we opened the door, swept the dry snow off our mukluks with a worn, slanted broom, and took our places beside her. Adults came and went while youngsters leaned against the wall to stare. A sharp breeze swept through the room as another trio of pre-schoolers pushed their way into the already crowded room. This must have been wearying to Mrs. Dennis. If we had

had the authority we would have sent them out. Second thought told us we could not do that even if it were within our rights. To be always with the sick was custom. To these whose lives were hemmed in without event, it was interesting to stand and watch someone die. Theirs was a stoicism not easily explained. I remember a funeral when I was expected to cry and didn't. Why should I? Long months before I had completely emptied my fountain of tears.

Mrs. Dennis had a husband who loved her and children who depended upon her. Though she was no help to them physically, her courage meant something to her household. Edging my way closer to the fevered form and bending low, I whispered, "We pray. You pray too." In a few words we tried to lead the tired one to the throne of God asking that He take away the pain that twisted her thin body. As we lifted our petition to Him, we were all ushered into divine Presence. Why should not the One who touched the sick two thousand years ago meet us in this desperate need? From that day on Mrs. Dennis, though steadily growing weaker, suffered no pain.

We went home light of heart. For that day we forgot the other cares of Nikolai whose weight was gradually pressing us down. The village was our responsibility and we loved it. We lived intensely. Had someone asked how many were in our family, we could rightly have answered a hundred. We shared the hardships of our people, also their joys. With the coming of Christmas we decorated the schoolroom recklessly. The children made yards and yards of paper chains while I struggled with a wreath and bells to hang on the door. It replaced the growling Communist general and the villagers loved it.

"Weather report for Fairbanks and vicinity: Clear and colder. Sunrise at 9:59 A.M. and sunset at 1:42 P.M." These were the short days we had heard about. In our poorly

lighted schoolroom we turned out our lanterns at noon and relit them at two o'clock. Were it not for the problem of getting appliance gas, we would have left them on all of the time. McGrath friends had warned us not to stay in the village too long at one stretch and gradually we began to realize the wisdom of their advice. The woods across the river kept us from seeing the sun for several weeks as it never rose high enough to allow it to be seen above the treetops. Our dark walls moved in closer; our room grew smaller and smaller.

Christmas week brought a welcome change. We flew to McGrath. Each day we went to visit around the community just for the sheer joy of talking. We chatted with roadhouse employees and spent delightful hours with new acquaintances at the Weather Bureau. Our tongues relaxed as we talked without carefully clipping each word with ever-present danger of being misunderstood.

McGrath had a reputation. It was said that any crime could be overlooked as long as you didn't kill a moose out of season. But McGrath had some wonderful people, people who had learned how to live with the country, who kept their homes cheery and bright and their spare time free of idleness. All of our friends had winter hobbies to keep them sane, but the hobby that intrigued us most was Margaret's model bugs and mosquitoes. Some were several inches long, made of balsam wood. I was told they were true to scale; I am content to believe it.

We basked in Alaskan friendliness and felt a warmth for McGrath that will never leave us completely. Denominational differences meant little. Those who cared about the welfare of the natives knew why we were in Alaska and by their kindness let us know that they were back of us. On the day we were to return to our village, they loaded us with frozen foods and sweets to enjoy by our fireside. The vacation was

needed and we appreciated getting away from our small den, but when the Stinson Gullwing raced its engine and the skis slipped easily over the hard-packed snow, I couldn't help but chirp, "I'm glad we're going home." Nikolai was home.

The plane leisurely circled the village and landed on Strawberry Lake. While pilot and passengers talked, two teams were coming toward the lake to take us and our luggage to the village. As we were about to get into the sleds, they gave a quick jerk and before we could realize what was happening, the malemutes had merged into one biting, yelping, tangling whirl. The mushers rushed into the midst of the fray, beating the dogs and screaming at the tops of their voices. Within minutes they had the tow lines straightened out and the sweaty, panting animals back in line while their masters relaxed. Their dogs had made them momentarily angry and we couldn't blame them. However, their immediate smiles after the battle let us know they were half proud of their best fighters. Assured that the situation was in competent hands, we got into the sleds and braced for the take-off.

My jacket had awkward bulges, bulges that moved. I shifted my uncomfortable load and it whimpered. The natives who had been watching me rather suspiciously came over and for their benefit I lifted out our newly acquired pup, which they admired. To be honest, we didn't know what they said, but we could hardly imagine them not admiring. He was no dear, cuddly thing, but a pup that had a good, healthy start toward being a big sled dog. He had been given in such a way that we almost had to accept him. He was ours, and because he was ours we liked him.

As I stuffed him back into the shelter of me, one of the mushers asked jokingly, "Pup, you want dog team?"

"Sure!" and with that we were jolting over the trail, snow

flying to either side of us. Finally excited children came as close to the trail as they dared. They were grinning shyly and that was welcome enough. The older people were less expressive. They accepted our return by coming into our cabin as had been their habit and then staying for hours, hours.

These hours were especially hard on Mildred. By Saturday she was in bed. The work, coupled with the freezing weather that we were not yet conditioned to, was too much. She had a high fever and as I tiptoed about doing the housework, I felt troubled. It seemed that every three minutes the door scraped the floor as someone pushed his way in. If Mildred was sick, they had to see her. By ten o'clock I was convinced that everyone could look elsewhere for something interesting. Whether it made folks angry or not, I was going to bolt the door, and I did. Someone came and kicked it. Not succeeding in being admitted, he shook it with all his might. Mildred turned over, her sleep broken.

When this incident repeated itself, I knew my plan could hardly be termed wise so I stationed myself in the schoolroom where I could stop visitors. I explained that Mildred needed rest and my explanations were well received. Why didn't I do that in the first place? After giving my prepared speech to more people than I cared to count, the word apparently was spread around for the stream of villagers trickled down to none.

Mildred's illness didn't overly alarm me as I had seen her through such attacks before. I fought an insistent and almost nagging tug not to be explained until I dropped to my knees to find the answer. With it came the impression that I should go to see Mrs. Dennis. Experience taught me not to follow every impression I got and I could see no reason for going there that day as we had been there just the evening before. I prayed, but the urge would not be reasoned aside.

I had to visit Mrs. Dennis. Stepping over to Mildred's bed, I told her I would be going out for a while. I had to visit the Dennises.

"Go ahead," was her ready reply. "It may be you will have a chance to talk to her."

With measured steps I made my way over newly fallen snow. What could I say? I thought of the letter from Fairbanks telling us of her cancerous condition and how she would suffer. She had suffered till the day when we had prayed. Her restful sleep, the fact that she felt no pain, proved a divine touch, but healing is not an end in itself. What God does for the human body is secondary to what He wants to do for the soul. Because we so often perceive the spiritual through the natural, He uses the lesser to show us the greater, His love and concern for that part of us which lives forever.

I glanced about to see if I was being followed. Strangely, there were no feet stepping in my tracks. As I rapped lightly on the old door, I heard Andrew Dennis call, "Onee."

I blinked my eyes as I left the glare of white snow for the dim light of the cabin. There were exactly two people in the room, only the kindly couple. Could this be the moment? It must be, for this in itself was a miracle that the room should be free of onlookers. After greeting the Dennises, I did not start my usual pattern of conversation for it was Andrew who opened the way.

Reaching for a pamphlet on the table, he handed it to me with, "This Bible?"

It was not a Bible and had no Scripture or even any wise saying. It was a collection of pictures, interior and exterior views of a great cathedral somewhere. I could not find a word of explanation.

I turned the dull pages slowly. "No, this no Bible. Pictures of church somewhere. No stories. No tell about Jesus.

This church. Maybe good church, but this book no Bible. Bible tell about Jesus."

I paused while Andrew talked native to his wife. She then said something to him at which he turned to me with another inquiry that thrilled me through and through. "What do Bible say?"

This was the opportunity for which we had prayed. Oh God, grant of Your wisdom! Slowly I told the story, the story that is known to Christian believers of all nations, the story of God who so loved a sinful world that He gave His only Son. In broken sentences, repeating myself over and over again, I talked about Jesus who went to the Cross with all our sin. He died that we might go free. At intervals I paused to give Andrew time to interpret to his companion who eagerly grasped at every truth. The price was paid. It was a gift from God to us. Free. All she had to do was to take it. Her face became radiant.

I continued, "Don't be afraid to die. No afraid." I shook my head to emphasize the negative. "No afraid. Ask Jesus to wash away all bad in your heart. He make you clean. All clean. Your heart clean, ready for Heaven. Go to Heaven. God's place, good place. Heaven is where Jesus is. You live with Him." Blessed fourteenth chapter of St. John!

Mrs. Dennis' eyes shone and she smiled. She had reason to smile. Though I had put forth every effort to make her understand, I knew my words alone were insufficient to explain the plan of salvation. At the same time I knew the anointing of the Holy Spirit. I was limited; He knows no limitations and Mrs. Dennis' spiritual eyes had been opened.

The door creaked as neighbors entered. These valuable moments had come to a close and in the blunt way of the village I could only say, "I see you again."

With my hand on the door, I had to turn to look at Mrs. Dennis once more. She was happy. She was beautiful.

Fairly skipping over the narrow path, I hurried into our cabin to tell Mildred. The morning's experience had brought a thrill, a joy not to be compared with anything else. The immediate transformation upon Mrs. Dennis' tired face was too remarkable to be termed other than heavenly. The few times more that we were privileged to visit her verified what I was convinced of that morning, that Mrs. Dennis had touched the Source of Life, she had Jesus in her heart.

The following week brought a change of weather with the mercury again slithering down to thirty below. One cold morning Second Chief came early to the schoolroom door pounding to gain entrance. He brought us the word that Mrs. Dennis had passed away.

He kept repeating himself, "My, she look nice. She look nice. People don't die like that here. She look nice." I knew what he meant. My word for it was beautiful. Since the morning she had found peace of heart, her face had been like an angel's. She *was* beautiful.

Mildred and I entered the cabin where the body had been carefully wrapped in white cloth and placed on a slab on the floor. There we witnessed a never-to-be-forgotten scene. It was not the burning of the incense nor the villagers feasting as if the occasion were festive. It was the perfect picture of peace on the face of the one who in reality was not there.

A few weeks later a letter came from a friend in California. The letter was dated the Saturday I had talked with the Dennises. It read in part, "I felt burdened for you today. When others got up from praying in morning devotions, I couldn't. There was a need in your village—you needed help and I had to pray."

I felt my throat tighten as I thrust the letter into Mildred's hands. Ours had been the privilege of telling another of

Christ, but the reward was to be shared, as the Scripture says, "We then as workers together with him" (God). Because of the efforts and the prayers of perhaps many, Mrs. Dennis, though limited in her knowledge of spiritual things, could know the Lord and the joy of sins forgiven. She had peace as she walked through the valley of the shadow of death; she feared no evil for He was with her.

Nor were our people the only ones who needed their faith built up. I was getting a schooling that was priceless. Outwardly I tried to maintain a cheerful attitude, but there was often a hidden inward struggle I didn't know how to explain.

I came to a full realization of what it was all about the day Mary wrote in her primer. Though not a particularly serious offense, I nevertheless had to say something to her about it lest the marking in books continue. I stopped at the child's desk to say, "No, Mary," at which the youngster burst into tears. I had not spoken harshly. I slipped my arm about her and explained that I was not angry, that I had only spoken to her that she would know not to mark in books. Mary's sobs, however, would not be quieted.

After a while I noticed that Mildred's class was giving its complete attention to my class, so I enlisted Kathryn's help. "Kathryn, tell Mary that I'm not mad. I tell her 'no' to help her. Tell her to stop crying."

Kathryn spoke in native to her younger sister who paid no attention to her. At that point the announcement of recess brought welcomed relief. A number of children gave vent to pent-up energy and went yelling and scuffling out the door, leaving it partly open. Mildred gave it an impatient kick as the lower half was farther open than the upper edge. She gave it a second glance, then shrugged her shoulders. Fault of the hinges.

I began grading papers. I couldn't put my mind to my

work, so I pushed the papers aside and walked to Kathrine Alexie, the oldest daughter of Miske Alexie who had gone to The Landing for our supplies. She had none of his easy-come easy-go attitude and even worked through recesses if we would let her. Because we had several Kathrines in the village we often called her Kathy.

"You do good work, Kathy."

Her only reply was a smile. Self-consciously she pulled her lips tightly over her teeth. She couldn't understand me at all when school first started, but she applied herself to our language and was worthy of the compliment. When classes resumed after recess, she copied words more carefully than before. Already we had forgotten the little incident with Mary, but her conspicuous absence reminded us.

Stooping to peer through the low windows heavy with ice, I could barely see her coming. She was probably late because she took time to dry her tears and dash cold water over her flushed face. As she shuffled to her seat, I slumped. Washed her face, nothing! I felt something akin to disgust rising within me though I succeeded in keeping still. The following hour and a half was a repeat performance of earlier morning.

At noon I carried the two chairs into the teacherage while Mildred filled our bowls with the ever-with-us soup that had been heating at the back of the stove while we were in school.

"Tired isn't the word for it. Teaching is a job in itself, but when someone snuffles half the day it is almost more than I can take. I felt like sending Mary home. She never learned a thing and I doubt that anyone else did either."

"My class was upset," Mildred added. "Especially Kathryn. I think she was embarrassed for Mary."

After lunch I asked the child to read.

Mary stammered through the words, "This . . . bal . . . hoo . . . hoooo . . . hoooo."

I could keep an even keel no longer. "Mary, stop that crying."

My firm command brought a wail that made Mildred's class push their boxes at a slant to watch the commotion on my side of the room. Eman giggled boyishly. The tension broke and all laughed aloud. This subdued the child a little and I pointed to Kathy, "You read."

"This ball is n-o-w, now."

"That word, Kathy, is n-e-w, new. Not now. See. N-e-w." The children repeated aloud, "New. New."

"That means 'not old.' This new pencil. That old pencil. Agnesa got a new coat. I got old coat."

I looked for a trace of expression on Agnesa's face at the comment about her new jacket, but she registered nothing. Apparently she did not understand me. Kathy went on with her story, the other beginners in half-whispers keeping up with her while Mary cried softly with only a pause now and then to blow her nose. Even that was a relief. I groaned inwardly.

Suddenly a thought came to me. It was as real as if someone had spoken. "There you are, Agnes. That's you."

I saw myself in my pupil. Surely the Lord was often wearied with the constant looking back toward mistakes that could in no way be corrected. Like Mary, I had lost much valuable time in tears. I could have profited by blunders and left them in the past where they belonged.

Mechanically I prompted the children as each took a turn reading. My own mind was turning memory's pages to the time when I had sat alone on the old fence or knelt at sacred altars to pray with always the same plea for a place in God's family. It seemed incredible to accept fully the fact that God, though seeing all of my failures and my impetuous

nature, could love me as a child. Yes, He forgives, but did He really love me? Much of my supposed communion with the Lord had been a sorry rosary of repetition. I had failed to appropriate the depth of meaning that the prophet had stored away in the verse of Micah that reads, "Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea," and as Isaiah said, "and will not remember thy sins." That was it. What was under the blood of Christ was more than forgiven, it was forgotten.

Thank you, little Mary. I learned from you.

After school a group of children, plus adults who had come to join them, crowded into our small quarters while we prepared supper. They soon were in quiet conversation among themselves.

"Mary making a scene all afternoon," sighed Mildred.

"Yes," I answered, my voice softer this time. "I don't think anything like that will happen again. We can leave these dry onions to soak a minute. I want to look up something in my scrapbook."

Thumbing through its rough pages, I found a poem and read it with new meaning.

A Laughing Prayer

By Marie Driscoll

The sorry prayers went up to God
Day after weary day,
Whimpering through the eternal blue,
And down the Milky Way —
And then a little laughing prayer
Came running up the sky,
Above the golden gutters, where
The sorry prayers go by.
It had no fear of anything,
But in that holy place
It found the very throne of God
And smiled up in His face.

SIX :- A Pleasant Surprise

A SOLEMN PROCESSION filed into our room. We looked up from grading papers, offered boxes to anyone who wished to be seated, and resumed our work. We sensed an uneasy stir, but being quite taken up with what we were doing, plus being grimly determined not to be bothered by nightly callers, we refused to heed their restlessness. After a few minutes Elena stepped forward and deliberately bumped the table.

Mildred laid her pencil down. "You want something?"

"This one," said she, pointing to a sad-faced girl barely out of her teens, "she get letter."

We looked at the stranger who had slipped in so quietly that we had failed to notice. Unlike the others, she had short hair cut evenly in the style of a Dutch bob. Her strong-looking hands were accustomed to hard work. She had no smile and to our words of greeting gave no reply. We did not know who she was and no one introduced her. We were under the impression that she came from Telida village as we had seen a team come from that direction earlier in the evening. We asked someone, but he didn't want to answer. He said he didn't know.

"You get letter? You want me to read?" Mildred asked.

"Yes," and the new girl slowly pulled out an envelope from the pocket of her jeans. The envelope was neatly folded, but the creases were soiled telling that it had been folded and unfolded often.

"You get this at store? At Landing?"

"Yes."

"Bertha read for you?"

"Yes."

"I read it? I read it again?" With each question Mildred's voice grew louder, each word as if it were punctuated with an exclamation point. I listened, wondering why she talked as if everyone were hard of hearing, all the while dimly conscious that I was developing this huskiness of speech. Somehow the people did seem to hear us better when we spoke louder.

"I read it?"

"Yes."

"I read letter. Oh, this bad news. Too bad. Too-oo bad. Are you Happy? Your name Happy?"

The girl bit her lip before answering softly, "Uh huh." Mildred read the letter aloud, pausing to add her own explanation. "It say, 'No pain at last.' That mean no hurt. Your husband die, but no hurt. That's good anyway, good that he never suffer long time. Lady at hospital said they send you his things. Maybe come to the store. You let me know. If don't come, let me know. I will write letter for you."

"Thank you."

Her little two-word courtesy sounded almost foreign, and it sounded mighty good. Those words gave us an inkling of what her husband had been like and friends in McGrath later confirmed what we had already supposed. Happy's husband had friends among both the natives and non-natives. He had been a kind old man who was ready to help anyone. He loved his young Happy and he liked to take her with him not only to his traplines but also to McGrath. He spoke English and had taught her well. When he became ill with tuberculosis, McGrath folk sent him to the sanitarium in Seward. Happy returned to their people, but her name no longer fit her. She was alone and sad.

"Sit down, Happy." As she shuffled slowly over to the box by the window we observed something else. She was ill.

A roar of laughter startled us. The racket came from the other room where village men were working. Our school-room had become a sled repair shop for a few evenings. From the sound of desks and logs being overturned, we knew that someone had untied our dog, really more a community dog than ours. He was putting on a show. Our roomful, with the exception of Happy and myself, hurried to see the goings-on. When we were alone, I crossed to where Happy sat, her hands between her knees and her head down. She had no reason to lift it.

"I'm sorry, Happy," I said as I placed my arm across the back of her chair. Mine was a feeble attempt at sympathy. I felt for her in her loss.

"Too bad my old man he die."

I nodded. "Too bad. You stay in village?"

Happy shook her head. "Tomorrow go Telida maybe."

Tomorrow came, but Happy never moved to Telida. She stayed with her parents in the village and they were glad to have her. She cut wood and packed water. When their supply was a day ahead, she helped neighbors, lifting heavy logs onto the saw horse and sawing with skill equal to any man in the village. I have yet to see any woman work harder. Perhaps she worked to forget, to forget Peter. Rarely did her smile return.

Every evening she came to our cabin. "I pack water for you."

"You feel strong enough, Happy?" we would ask anxiously.

"Sure," would come her quick reply tinged with bitterness. Lovable by nature, her whole personality cried out for understanding and circumstance forced her to steel herself against it.

At our insistence, Happy enrolled in Old Timers school. She was in my class and I hoped that she would take an interest in reading to fill her lonely evenings. She never learned books. She was certainly as intelligent as the next person and a ready worker, but her inability to adjust to the village she had once left put a block to her thinking. My new student learned two words, Peter Rabbit. I would stand by her desk and help her with each word in the book, knowing she was staying with her assignment for only one reason. She wanted to scan the pages until she came to Peter Rabbit and then say those two words by herself. I never hurried her nor could I become impatient. You see, her husband's name was Peter Rabbido.

"Too bad my old man he die." Our natives may express their sorrow differently than their non-native neighbors, but that does not mean it is less keen. After years of village life I cannot yet say I always understand the natives. By the same token, they do not always understand me. Backgrounds have lent influence to our thoughts and actions. It makes our outward responses differ, yet inwardly we are much the same.

Every people has its share of definite personalities, however. Second Chief was one. During the months of January to April the mercury chased itself up and down the thermometer, anywhere from fifty below to fifty above. We had days of glorious sunshine counterbalanced by days of snow and fog. During one of these gloomier sessions, Second Chief made a point to come every evening just after dark.

He spoke with a voice of impending doom, "Get snow off a roof. Pretty soon whole roof of school he come down. Then what you do, huh? Some morning teachers he wake up. No school. Only snow, that's all."

What would you do? Just what we did. When Saturday rolled around we borrowed shovels and a rickety ladder and

climbed on our roof. Happy saw us and came with a shovel and an admirer. The four of us dug right in and in less than an hour we had the worst of the snow off the roofs of our two rooms.

Second Chief came to see us the next day.

"Too bad," he complained. "No snow on roof. Now all heat she go out top."

When spring thaws came we were grateful that no more water seeped through than what did. Had we not cleared the roofs, we might have been forced to close school. It wasn't unusual for a quiet reading class to be disturbed by warning drips from the ceiling. Hurriedly desks were moved to save books from the drops that might any minute break into an open trickle. Our pupils did not mind. If the truth were known, I think they enjoyed the extra commotion.

Our children made amazing progress for their first year in school, but the credit for their progress does not belong entirely to them. Actually they were an average cross section of youngsters with some quicker to grasp than others. Their parents in evening classes had a great deal to do with what the children gained during those early months.

With the exception of a few adults who would not be coaxed to school, the entire village was working at the printed page. Playing with English words became a game in their homes. As far as we know, we had no problem of parents resenting the children's advantages, or of the children thinking that they knew more than their elders. In homes of first-generation Americans, such a conflict occasionally arises. Even though a child does not consider himself superior to his parent who speaks with an accent, the parent may so fear such an attitude that he will resent his Americanized child. This situation has arisen in other villages; children have refused to speak English rather than face envy and ridicule at home. The closed mouth is not always

stubbornness. Often it is timidity and sometimes self-protection.

Our enrollment of twenty in day school took a grand slip during beaver season. According to regulations set down by Fish and Wildlife, everyone over twelve years of age was allowed a limit of ten beavers. Parents asked to take their older boys and girls to beaver camp with them as the added limits of furs were important to the livelihood of the family. They went with our blessing, arithmetic papers, and reading lessons. Our pupils usually returned with assignments done as they were not pressed for time in camp. Once the snares were set under the ice, they had only to kill time and wait for a beaver to get caught. The skinning out is easy for those who have their master's degree in trapping. Often the catch was brought back frozen and the work done at home where the hides were stretched on boards to dry and the meat was thrown into the pot to feed the family. Beaver meat is clean meat though it does taste slightly woody.

In every community are those who do not place enough value on education. Nikolai had two or three parents who, upon hearing their children read a few lines from a primer, felt that surely they had learned it all and wanted to take their children out of school to help around home or camp. Our task was to convince papa that there were several things we had not had time to put across to the young hopefuls. We were not always successful.

Mrs. Skogomy's younger daughter, eleven-year-old Martha, was tubercular and her dropping out of school was necessary as she could no longer leave their tent home. She spent almost all of her time lying on a cotton mat on the floor. Her mother loved her and did for her what she could, but she had little to do with. We made custards and puddings for the girl and gave her warm clothing that was sent

to us to give. We watched her thin face grow thinner. Martha had the same large brown eyes and straight dark hair that was characteristic of these village children, but her skin was light with a transparent quality that comes from long hours indoors. Her voice was soft and high-pitched. Always her small, bony fingers moved nervously as she played with the red string twined about them. This was supposed to check bleeding if she had a pulmonary hemorrhage. A superstition? Yes, but she needed the comfort of her red string just as a child needs the comfort of a teddy bear. It had no healing virtues, but it gave comfort. Heavy chains about the ankles must be lifted off gently for a hurried yank may leave deep bruises.

We never marched into our village health problems with yards of gauze and a manual on hygiene. We taught slowly and mostly by example. Little was understood about the care of the sick. Patients were given only fish soup or moosemeat. Often they were hardly fed at all as there were no attractive trays to encourage appetites. In isolated Alaskan villages, no one begs you to live. In a village that knows want, the mortality rate is unreasonably high. Half of the children born in Nikolai never reached maturity. The reason? "He no eat no more, that's all."

We learned the meaning of survival of the fittest. We likewise learned the meaning of the importance of the transition period in Alaska native history. A few extremists recommend that no one go to them. "Leave them alone; they're happy. Leave them in their ignorance," they say.

Live in a village and you will think otherwise. First, they are not overly happy. Do you laugh when you are sick and have no food in your cache? Do you laugh when a drunken father gives all his furs for a bottle of whiskey? Neither are you blissfully ignorant when you know that others are taking advantage of you, yet you cannot talk enough English to

defend yourself. If this be your lot, you are both unhappy and wise, much too wise.

These are the problems of the transition period. Since their first contact with early Russian traders, the natives have no longer lived the adjusted lives of their culture. They are in between two worlds. They can never go back to the stone age. To pension them and keep them where they are is an injury and an insult; America bows her head in shame over treatment of the Indians on reservations. We have one fair course of action and that is to speed our natives to the twentieth century, to teach them to make their way in the civilization that has been forced upon them. This is our God-given responsibility. If we do well their young people, walking as our young people, will be our reward.

Mildred and I never felt alone in our efforts for Nikolai. Though we had scant connection with the outside world and our mail came through to us once in weeks, we knew we were not out of mind. An ordinary day might be interrupted by a bush plane flying low and circling the village. Sometimes we recognized the plane, other times not. Occasionally planes going cross country deviated from their course out of curiosity. Others came deliberately and later reported in McGrath that they were sure we were all right as they had seen us out in the clearing. Some of the pilots we never met, but they knew about our being there. Others asked for our mail in McGrath and dropped it to us or landed on the lake with parcels. They seldom waited for thanks. They knew the bush country. Knowing its bleak, lonely, sunless days of sameness, they knew we were appreciative of their thoughtful gestures.

When we got mail it almost always brought happy surprises. I remember getting all excited about a can of potatoes from my folks. We cheechakos had let our sack of potatoes freeze. We thought that anything frozen ought to be thawed,

so we thawed them. Our floor was so cold that they froze hard as rocks again when we put them back under the table. We thawed them once more, only to discover that they had rotted. An expensive lesson with potatoes at twenty dollars a hundred! It seemed a near tragedy in view of being unable to get any more before breakup when boats could go to The Landing.

We had reasons for wanting a post office in Nikolai, and one was potatoes.

The distant hum of a plane was always heard first by the small children at play. They would sing out their one English word, "Airplane, airplane," until it was echoed by older children. By the time we heard a few bass voices against the background music of the howling dogs, we joined the adults straining their eyes hoping to be the first to identify the plane.

One afternoon a Gullwing flew low over the village, circling it several times as if to land. Everyone stood frozen to the spot from sheer fright.

Mildred spoke to those nearest, "River not safe for plane to land. Is there any way we can let him know?"

"No."

"Why no one mark the river to tell planes it not safe?"

"No one know he come."

Mildred folded her arms and huddled like a sparrow in the wind. She had forgotten her jacket, but she was not going back to the cabin for it. I was standing by Chief. Desperately I prayed. The plane could easily go through the ice as an early thaw had weakened it. Chief's face grew tense. Ramming his hands deeper into his back pockets, he spit out of the corner of his mouth and followed with a full-length sentence, "I don't like to see man break neck."

"No, Chief, I don't either."

The man-made bird came to a safe landing. We tore

down the path and onto the river where two pilots greeted us.

One grinned. "Guess this wasn't the best place to land. Here are your postoffice supplies. We'll be back every Friday with mail and pick up whatever you have to send."

With that they were ready to take off.

Thus the inauguration of our new post office. Assuming the duties of postmaster meant added work; the contact with the outside world was worth it. Also, we would have the sheer fun of dashing down to the river once a week to say "Hi!" to someone beside members of our overgrown family. That evening we unpacked more supplies than we knew what to do with, browsed over lengthy forms, and experimented with new scales. We were bordering on the hilarious and tried every stamp supplied. The half-written letter on the table was promptly stamped BUTTER AND EGGS PERISHABLE.

We had been planning toward our post office for months. Before going to our village we had met Bob Bartlett, Alaska's representative to Congress, at a Women's Club meeting in McGrath. He had promised to do what he could toward getting a post office for us. On the strength of his word we had jealously guarded one corner of our school-room, the corner that never leaked, for our government office building. Slim, a quiet young man with a pockmarked face, offered to build the necessary enclosure. Within a few hours the three-by-five room was ready. It was only a framework covered with chicken wire, the donation from someone's fish wheel material, but it was our post office and secure as the vaults at Fort Knox.

Our villagers felt important. Frankly, so did we. Officially we were on the map and even received letters addressed to Nikolai Chamber of Commerce. Our post office contributed to our writing classes; likewise, our writing classes con-

tributed to the post office. No other project did so much to stimulate interest in English as having friends in other places write to the children. Like all children, they were thrilled to have pen pals who wrote regularly and often sent small gifts or souvenirs.

A team coming over the trail brought a message from Bertha that a registered letter relative to our post office was waiting at The Landing. I was tickled pink for an excuse to take a long ride in a dog sled. Perhaps I should not say "long" as the trip was thirteen miles each way, but it was a long way *out* of the village.

The sleds, of course, were more than the flat kind children play with. Dog sleds of the upper Kuskokwim demand time and skill in the making. The natives carefully select young birch trees, peel the bark, shape and season the runners over a period of time. Steel runners are fastened to the hard birch runners and removed when the weather is so cold that the steel would freeze to the snow and cause heavier pulling. The backs of the runners, or stanchions, extend out far enough that the musher can ride on them when the trail is smooth. When the team is having to labor too hard, he jumps off the sweeps and helps push, or runs along behind to lighten the load. The body of the sled is known as the basket. The narrow webbing around it is of moose or caribou skin, twisted and varnished when varnish is available.

Over to the sled I waddled for I had so many clothes on I looked ridiculous. The only pretty thing about me was my feet as Anna Alexie had made me new mukluks of caribou skin. I climbed into the basket and Mrs. Skogomy tucked me in with quilts and fur robes under and around me. I liked her attention. She was motherly and I was a teeny bit scared.

Nick and his seven dogs were assigned to take me to The Landing, promising to make the thirteen miles in a

couple of hours. He made it in fifteen minutes less than the time he allotted, though I could have argued it was a lot longer. Riding in a sled is quite a novelty. I would be singing its thrill for the rest of my life if we had gone two miles and turned back. I was in it long enough to know that sleds are narrow and you don't feel as though you are flying over snow. You are bouncing over ice. Facing a twenty-below zero wind, I got cold in spite of furs. My forehead and nose felt it first, then my toes. I tried to bury my face in my arms, but that hurt my back. I wiggled my toes, but they could not wiggle very far with six pair of wool socks over them. Once in a while Nick looked at me and asked, "All right?" Sure, I was all right. I meant I was not frozen solid, just frozen.

At long last we pulled slowly into a grove of trees near the store where Nick tied his dogs and directed his passenger to the house where she could get warm. Numbly I crawled out of the sled and made my way across the hard packed snow. I looked down at my legs to be sure they were moving. My eyelashes were clumsy with frost and it seemed as if the house was far, far away. In a small sense I understood why people let themselves lie down in the snow and freeze. However, there was actually nothing wrong with me, nothing but what could be cured by a warm room and something to eat.

Bertha had been watching from the window and already had the teakettle on to make coffee for us. Her large home was comfortable, but as I leaned against the heavy arm of the sofa I collected all my feelings under one heading — ill-at-ease. Months had passed since I had been anywhere without Mildred. To my alarm, I realized I had difficulty carrying on a conversation without help. What would I be like after a couple of years of village life?

Our stay at The Landing was brief. The return trip was

slow and monotonous. The dogs' dispositions which were not good to begin with grew worse with fatigue. Occasionally they stopped to snarl at one another. Nick ran in among them, jerking them by the collar and setting each in his place to untangle the lines so we could start covering ground again. The dogs acted as if they were hardly able to pull me, that is, until within a mile of the village. Suddenly they revived, pricked up their ears, and lunged forward with a jolt that almost threw both Nick and myself. We practically flew into the village where the other seventy or eighty dogs announced our arrival in grand chorus. Closest thing to a band that one could meet.

Dragging my feet through Nikolai snow, I passed Chief's cabin as he came out.

"Hello, Chief."

"Back to stay?"

"Yes." (Whatever did he think?)

The next cabin was ours. Mildred met me at the door, her face strained and tired. Before I had a chance to ask, she blurted out, "Forty-seven visitors since you left."

Without thinking, I burst out laughing, having seen in a flash exactly what she had gone through.

Mildred explained, "The minute your team went over the hill they started coming. Do you think anyone would talk to me? No. I put a pad and pencil on the table and every time someone entered, I made a mark. I'm so tired I don't know what to do." To prove her point she shoved her paper at me, a paper with rows of marks like broken fences.

Like an army of ants on maneuvers, the steady stream of people continued through the evening hours. Remembering when our stateside shipment had arrived, now they likely thought I had come with something new, but they waited around in vain. All I had was the registered stamp stock I had signed for and a can of grapes for Mildred.

Our twenty-below weather stayed with us long enough to make the river ice safe again. The next time a plane circled to land we had no reason to panic. Never in its history had our village been so overrun with traffic. We had a plane every Friday, weather permitting, and occasionally a non-scheduled plane. Never were these planes taken for granted either. We always watched as if each were the last plane that we would ever see. One late afternoon a Piper Cub circled and landed on the river. A stranger got out of the plane, but before we could get down on the ice, the plane took off. We watched to be sure that it cleared the trees as it lifted from the river. We then turned our attention toward the newcomer whom we did not know, but several men had gone down to meet him so we turned back to our cabin. Soon one of our faithful messengers, the children, came in reporting, "Priest come."

"Priest?"

"Priest. Native."

Mildred and I were dumbfounded. We had taken it for granted that the Russian Orthodox Church had long forgotten the village, having sent in no one for more than four years. We had moved our Story from school time to Friday evening and his coming presented a conflict. What should we do? There was nothing to do but to go on as usual. It was Story night and we had prepared for it. The priest? We would extend a welcome and an invitation to attend our meeting.

The priest kindly accepted and at the hour appointed he arrived. We went to the back of the room and introduced ourselves. We were interested in meeting him, wondering what he would be like. Without a doubt, he likewise wondered about us. A middle-aged man of quiet manner, almost timid, he was a native from down river, a cautious man and somewhat on the defensive. As we became better acquainted

with him, we traced his reticence to his background. He had been in school only enough to be overly aware of his lack, consequently he was without confidence among white people. Really, he need not have felt apologetic; we knew better than to judge a person by formal schooling. We saw an open attitude in the man that compensated for his other needs.

We told him we were having our Story and he nodded his approval, adding that the Deaphans had already told him about the meetings. We felt an air of expectancy. Our people were eager that their priest share their Story and see their school. After singing several songs they settled back to hear Mildred speak, the best of her abilities coming to the front as she told the story of Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus. Attention was keen and even the babies were quieter than usual.

Before dismissing the meeting, Mildred acknowledged our visitor, asking him to say a few words. Rev. Changsak stood to his feet and turned toward the people. His words were few, but he said much. "Good Story. They tell you the truth. You listen, come to every Story. Here you will find help."

SEVEN :-:- A Time to Relax

WITH THE COMING OF SPRING came longer daylight hours. We could make it out of the village as far as to the lake and back after school and before lamp-lighting time. The borders of the village had seemed to move in during the dark months and we craved room to stretch. Runty trees and bushes grew close to the trail, but once the lake was reached we breathed deeply and took the long look.

We called the season spring though there was still snow on the ground. The air was warm, warm by comparison, that is. Tukonee, our handsome dog, who had moved to the shed with the first hint of a thaw, always accompanied us. And the children. Never without them, there were all sizes and ages. Hiking out to the lake every afternoon became a sort of ritual. We were free. Spring had come.

Breakup of the river could be almost any time. We wanted it to hold off, which it did, for only one reason. A plane was to come to take us to McGrath for a few days' vacation. The trip was a gift from Gene and Lorraine Smith of the Weather Bureau. We did not know them well, having just met them when we came north. We were looking forward to getting better acquainted. They were in Alaska because of their work, but they made the most of being where they were. Leisure hours during the week found them enjoying the out-of-doors or puttering with hobbies. Sundays found them in the little log chapel. Having them as friends and helpers meant much to the missionaries in McGrath and to us also. No Gospel worker who is honest with himself will consider

himself so capable that he would minimize the efforts of lay members. They are the church as well as we.

The plane came as ordered. Arriving in McGrath someone asked where we were going to stay. Matter-of-fact we said we were going to stay with the Smiths. We were told they were not at home.

"They aren't home? Where are they?"

"In Takotna. It's just a few hours by team over the mountain. Maybe they will be back tonight. Maybe not. They went with John and Eleanor Phillips, the new missionaries."

"What if they don't get back tonight?"

"That's all right. Their house is unlocked. Move in. That's what I'd do."

That's what we did. McGrath folk made it their business to see that we were well cared for. Pearl Laska sent a message that she was expecting us for supper in her apartment in back of her store. Besides being storekeeper she was a public school teacher and a parka maker. Adults do not confess to hero worship, but I had a mild case of something akin to it. Pearl was a small, plain individual whose depths made you want to know her better, a person with ability yet absolutely without pretense.

The Smiths did not arrive home that evening. We returned to the house in the government section late and opened the unlocked door to find our suitcases as we had left them that afternoon. The four-room house was like a castle to us who had been living in one crowded room and the front-room rug a soft cloud under our feet. Gaily we unpacked, purring about the luxury of forgetting work. We didn't relax. Large planes taking off from the runway, flashing lights as a truck went by, and sounds we were unable to identify disturbed us. After some time Mildred managed to shut out the strangeness and was almost asleep when I brought her back by bolting up in bed.

Startled, she exclaimed, "What in the world is the matter?"

"A noise. It's not a plane; it's some kind of a motor. It started all of a sudden. Listen — it's still going. Hear it?"

Mildred laughed. "The refrigerator. Now go to sleep."

Maybe she could, but I couldn't. I shuddered. Civilization!

The following day we visited Clover. She had been our neighbor those first few weeks in our cabin by the river and had given us much sound advice and help in getting ready for the winter. We went back to ask a dozen more questions and to have about that many more doughnuts. There the Phillips found us when they returned from Takotna.

Introductions were not needed. John and Eleanor were exactly as we had pictured them. John was a tall, rather reserved young man with the makings of a minister. His wife was a friendly, little, redheaded woman seldom stranger to anyone. Between them and the Smiths we had a wonderful time. Gene and Lorraine turned us loose. Planned activities were few; we were told to come and go as we pleased. Mildred and I visited friends, made our way to the stores to chat with anyone who might happen to be there and to the roadhouse to catch up on the latest in the local Who's Who. McGrath was a tonic for that "left-out-feeling." Everyone meets it sooner or later, but not in McGrath. You know everybody and everybody knows you.

O yes, we went to a wedding reception. It was at the Smiths and the bride and groom were from Nikolai. It seems their marriage license had run out since it was good for only one year. At any rate, that's what the groom told us. This particular couple were in McGrath two years before to get a marriage license. The commissioner told them to have the wedding ceremony performed within a year or they would have to get another license. Unfortunately, the Russian priest never came. At the end of a year their license

expired and they had to get a new one. "Costs more that way when you have to get a license every year," they complained. Yes, it does cost more that way and since the offense was in the past and certainly one of ignorance we did not try to disturb their conscience. We suggested they get the commissioner to marry them and then the priest could perform the ceremony again if they wanted a church wedding. They did as we advised. After they got their one-year license fixed up for life they came to tell us. Lorraine served coffee and that was the reception.

McGrath folks were good to us and our people. We were returning to Nikolai with school supplies and valuable teaching aids from the upper grades teacher. Realizing our lack of experience in the teaching field, he had been glad to help us, and we in turn had been more than glad to accept help from him. We felt that we were going back to our station with renewed zeal and a bit of knowledge to go with it.

We had no fears about landing on the lake. The ice was well marked with rows of small spruce trees to outline the path the pilot should take. The weather had been nippy and that meant that there would be no overflow to weaken the ice or endanger our landing on skis. No sooner had the teams brought us into our village than we were again in the swing of activity. We started with a party for mothers and preschool children, much to the chagrin of our school children. For once they were left out, and it was then that we saw that in our doing for them we had overdone.

So we had ups and downs. The short vacation from school had really been good for the children, and certainly it helped the teachers. By this time all of Mildred's class had gone through first-grade books and were doing arithmetic of second and third-grade level. Mine? They still had difficulty

understanding me and I never heard a word of English unless it was read or parroted.

The one thing that comforted was my remembering my first year in school. One day the teacher had asked what we had for breakfast. When my turn came I said I didn't know. My teacher tried to help. "Toast?" "No." "Eggs?" "No." "Mush?" "No." I did have mush, but we had another word for it at our house, a Norwegian word. Funny little girl, she doesn't even know what she had for breakfast. I remembered and was a better teacher for remembering.

I said we had ups and downs. Missionaries are not angels. God has put a lot of things into the hands of fumbling mortals. I ran out of patience one day and staged an endurance test.

"I ask question. No answer. I tired no one talk. Now you talk English. What color this?" as I held up a yellow book.

No answer.

"You know this color. What color?"

No answer.

"I teach no more till someone answer," and I sat down at my egg crate desk and began grading papers. After a few minutes I repeated the question, but received no reply so graded more papers.

Then, timidly, Kathy broke the silence that gripped my side of the room. "Yellow book."

I could have hugged her. I was most enthusiastic in my praise of Kathy and I meant every word of it. I had been worried that I might lose the contest and then where would I be? My children will never know how many times they nearly won the battle.

The winter had not been an easy one for the school children. I marvel that they did not openly resent the abrupt change we brought into their heretofore undisciplined lives and unscheduled days. They craved the out-of-doors, not

knowing that we too would have liked to throw off the bondage of formal education for a while. When the sun threw shafts of light into our schoolroom and the dust particles played around in the rays, creating a near-hypnotic effect, we had to break routine. We took to practical schooling in the form of a clean-up campaign, clearing the village of literally hundreds of tin cans and other debris. Spring thaw and its accompanying smells were not delightful. Little wonder that many of the villages have been prey to summer epidemics.

Blind Sergie reminisced of the good old days, "Old people he say long time ago he no sick. He follow moose. He follow caribou. Move all time. No cabin, only campfire, maybe tent. Everybody be happy. Children he no fight, he no sick. Better that way, I think."

The good old days, of course, are always better relived than lived. Nevertheless, I knew he had a point. "Yes, Sergie, I think maybe better that way too. But Alaska he change. Not so many furs now, not so many moose now. Alaska change lots in last few years. Village have to change too. You build cabin and live here. We have school and clean up village. Pretty soon not so many children sick. Not so many die. It be better after while."

I do not know how convincing were my words. The proof would have to be in our actions that followed and we prayed God to help us. For generations sameness meant security. Now sameness is gone. The game has been depleted in some areas, the old landmarks have been removed, and we offer instead our western music and high-powered advertising. The past is gone and the present offers something always out of reach. These concepts they cannot grasp by themselves. They live too close to their loneliness to see it with proper perspective. "All day I lonesome. That why I drink.

All day I walk and I walk. What you want me to do? I got to do something."

Yes, native friend, you have got to do something. You have to learn to live all over again.

If they as a race fail to adjust, their failure is ours. If I worked too hard, if the winters at Nikolai must be with me for the rest of my life, the Lord forgive me. I did not know what else to do.

We tried to keep a semblance of school as late into the spring as we could though we learned that families would be leaving for fish camps as soon as the river opened. The twenty-seventh of April the South Fork opened. Breakup occurred during our sleeping hours which was quite a disappointment to us. We wanted to see the first piece of moving ice. We missed it, but we saw many that followed, great chunks jostling each other as they moved downstream. There were assorted noises as willows along the river bank tore loose and logs tried to enter the race, but there were none of the earth-rending sounds we had thought we would hear. Our tributary to the Kuskokwim was small. The natives insisted that breakup at Nikolai was always different from the main rivers where the radio blares every crack in the ice.

The following morning we heard the church bell. Three tolls meant death. We waited for the sound of the fourth; no fourth so we knew that old Esai had died. He had lain many weeks on a cabin floor waiting his time to go. We never visited him often because he resented us, perhaps regarded us as intruders. We never learned the reason for his deep resentment, but he had lived many years and maybe he had many reasons.

In the late afternoon we went to his cabin to pay our respects. The air in the low room was sickening; it was heavy with burning incense. His elderly widow, bent and gnarled with years of hard work, sat alone against the wall.

We stepped over to tell her we were sorry, then joined a group of bystanders in the corner.

The body, wrapped in white muslin, was on the floor. Nearby a number of men, also on the floor, were working with a portable sewing machine and yards of blue denim. They had already made the coffin and were going to line it and cover the outside. Remembering Mrs. Dennis' casket, we knew that they were capable of a neat piece of work, but their work did not seem to be going as it should. A couple of the men attempted to run the machine, but without success. They sat at the back trying to push the material through while turning the handle on the wheel backwards with a left hand. It couldn't be done. The women stood by giggling, even old Granny smiled. At that point the men played it as a huge joke and then it was no longer funny. Either Mildred or I would gladly have done the sewing, but we had a strong hunch that we had better keep hands off.

Just then Kathryn pushed the door open and stepped in. With one hand still on the door knob, she viewed the pathetic scene before her and her dark eyes grew darker with indignation. Walking across the room with queenly bearing, she gave a stern order in native and the men got up from the floor. She seated herself at the machine and started to work, running up the straight seams with experienced hand. She by her competence had the others at her command. As she was breaking the threads, we went outdoors. We did not go to Nikolai to be onlookers. We were proud of Kathryn.

Mildred and I did not attend the funeral which took place three days later. The church doors were closed to non-members unless an invitation was extended, consequently we were at home catching up on correspondence. The table was near the window and we planned, upon seeing the

people start for the cemetery, to follow for the last rites. When the service was over, everyone filed out and the parade began. The village leaders wearing colorful robes and carrying banners and icons led the procession. We counted. Three times around the church they marched and then turned toward the burial plot.

We then put on our jackets and followed. To our surprise, the people did not stop at the cemetery quaint with its decorative fences and Russian crosses. They slowly wended their way down the trail toward the lake. The solemn procession stopped near a clump of trees and by the time Mildred and I caught up with them, the hole was being filled. Having learned their custom from Mrs. Dennis' funeral, we each picked up a handful of earth and threw it on the coffin. Mrs. Deaphan, old Esai's daughter, whispered pleasantly, "We glad you come." We were glad to know that we had made the right gesture, for we were always aware that the social customs of these native people are as important to them as our social amenities are to us.

Later in the day when Second Chief stopped by our cabin for a neighborly chat, we worked up the courage to ask him why the burial had not been in the village burial grounds.

"Too much people all time," he replied. "Man sick. Door open and shut. She get so tired she say, 'When I dead I want quiet place. Tree by trail go to lake. Put me where it quiet'."

Life and death are very close in a small community. While most of the people were concerned with burial of one, Mildred and I were fighting for the life of another. Martha Dennis was steadily growing weaker. We contacted the Seward Sanitarium about admitting her. The latter part of April their social worker wired McGrath that Martha would be admitted as a patient as soon as we could get her there. The telegram was relayed by radio to Eagle Creek Mine some twenty miles away, and a team brought the message

to our village. The family, as well as the village fathers, were more than willing that she go, but the child did not have strength to walk to the next cabin. For her to make the trip alone was unthinkable. After several conferences, the natives agreed that none of them knew enough about air travel to accompany her. When it narrowed down to one of us going with her, we felt that Mildred should. She had not been well and should not be left in the village alone.

A team was dispatched to the mine to have a message radioed to McGrath for a plane the morning of May sixth. It was a beautiful day with clear flying weather. While Mildred got ready, I went up to the Skogomy tent to help Martha. I gave her a blue overnight case and helped her pack. We would have no apologies to make for her. She was clean, pretty, and well mannered.

"Airplane, airplane," echoed through the village. Amid the yelping of dogs, good-byes, and bits of unheeded advice, we helped little Martha into the sled. Quickly she and Mildred were whisked off down the trail to the lake where the plane would land. Several of us followed with another team to say goodbyes again to the child so thrilled with the sense of adventure that she really forgot she was leaving.

There was overflow on the ice and had this not been an emergency, the pilot would not have landed. He was eager to get off and within minutes they were in the air. We watched until there was not even a black dot in the blue before we turned slowly homeward.

The people scattered to their dwellings. I walked alone through the schoolroom and into our living quarters. I heard my own footsteps. I looked at the empty desks. I would make up the yearly records and put away the books and pencils. For several weeks we had looked forward to this grand climax. Now it was strangely hollow and I wasn't sure it was what I wanted. Only six or eight families re-

mained in Nikolai and more would be going as soon as river travel permitted.

I had much to do. Keeping busy, I failed to notice the time until after supper. When I looked at my watch, it was ten o'clock and I was writing by daylight. The long days we had heard about were creeping upon us.

The following morning I looked into our water pails—empty. You cannot get far into the day without water, so I trotted down to the river's edge. I stooped to dip water, muddy water. I sat on my heels and thought. Nothing profound. I had time, so I thought.

A clear voice snapped me to attention. "Come with me." Startled, I looked up into Kathy's laughing eyes. We laughed together because she had surprised me. Without another word the girl turned away and tramped across last year's yellow-gray grass, squashing it into the wet ground. I snatched my pails and ran after her, following her to a large rowboat in which were seated several youngsters representing every family remaining in the village. Each had some type of container. Taking my place among them, I watched two of the older girls struggle with the oars. I saw they were not used to handling oars so I offered help. "I help you. I can row. I used to live by big water."

The girls only smiled in reply, the kind of smile that let you know that they appreciated good intentions. A white girl wouldn't know how to row a boat.

By some maneuvering they got us to the island in the middle of the river where we reached over the side of the boat to scoop up chunks of ice that clung to the sand. The ice was sparkling clear, not yet porous enough to absorb the mud that was being carried along with the high water. We would melt the ice for our drinking water.

The next day brought a warm sun and the ice was no more. Had I foreseen that, I might have suggested that we

go for a second trip the day before. There was nothing to do now but to dip muddy river water above the village, let it settle, and pick out the tiny fish that were swimming in it. It was fun to catch them with my fingers.

Every evening I listened to Tundra Topics for word of Mildred's return, but McGrath was in the throes of breakup. The town had been faced with the possibility of a flood and the Air Force had to come and bomb the ice jams. After that small planes still remained grounded until the airstrips were somewhat dried off.

I had no choice but to get along by myself but I wasn't delighted with my own company. The villagers saw to it that I had the best and brought me fresh fish and ducks. Accustomed to economizing to the extreme I wouldn't waste a thing. Two fish and four ducks in less than a week! I downed them all. Duck and black coffee—a pretty good breakfast!

School records done, I decided to plant a garden. Early every morning I went out to turn soil, breaking the partly frozen clods to hasten the thawing. Villagers looked on. Second Chief came by to tell me that the river would flood its banks and all my planting would be for nothing. At first I let myself get into a dither and almost moved to a clump of willows higher up, but I remembered the snow on the roof.

I never asked anyone else to plant a garden, but several offered excuses as to why they would not plant. Mrs. Skogomy and Mrs. Alexie, however, said they would like to have gardens and I offered my help. I had never before planted a garden by myself; here I was teaching others how to do it. Besides, I could read directions on the seed packages. After a long winter indoors, It was nothing short of wonderful to spend hours in the sunshine. I saw flies and they looked pretty good after no sign of insect life for months. This view

changed within a week. Flies swarmed on the dog fish and on the bits of leftover meat that hung smelling in the sun. When I saw them crawling over the faces of little children and babies, no one bothering to brush them away, I revolted. Ah, blessings of winter!

Exactly three weeks from the time Mildred and Martha left, mail came via one of the outboards. It had gone to The Landing for supplies. This old mail, having been there since the trails had become too soft to travel, nevertheless brought news from home. At the time more boats left us for summer fish camp, laden with people, dogs, clothing, and the most necessary household items. Only three families who couldn't afford gas for their boats stayed in the village, and I.

I heard a boat in the night, but refused to get excited. I wouldn't even get up. It might not be Mildred, again maybe. I lay in the light of midnight and wondered if I should get up. I waited a while until the motor groaned to a stop a short distance from our cabin. I bounded out of bed and ran to the door. Mildred was coming up the path. The family that brought her from The Landing turned in at another cabin. We would be alone and there was much to talk about. All bottled up, I wanted to talk first.

Then Mildred told about her experience taking Martha to the sanitarium, "Well, the poor child was scared. She made the trip fine and had no trouble breathing until we were in a smaller plane flying over the mountains between Anchorage and Seward. Then she had difficulty getting her breath. I was mighty glad to get her to the hospital and in the nurse's hands."

"What did they have to say when they saw her?"

"I talked to the doctor first and he was a little disgusted when I said that she had never had an Xray. He couldn't figure out how we got in without one as that is strictly against the rules. He said I would have to stay in Seward

until they examined her. He thought she might not have TB and then would want me to take her home, but as soon as he saw her he had no doubts. He looked at her lungs through the fluoroscope and asked me to go along. They discovered that she was in a very serious condition; one lung is completely gone and the other is bad."

"What are her chances? Were we too late?"

"I don't know. But she'll get good care and she seemed happy when I left her. She's cute and all the nurses made over her. She talked English, too. That surprised me as I was going to talk for her and the doctor stopped me. I never realized she had learned so much during her few months in school."

We talked on into the morning. With the establishing of a school came problems galore. We did not want a church school; we both believed the two should be separate. We had asked the Alaskan Native Service to take our school, but they did not feel that they could take on another one. The Department of Education in Juneau would take it only under certain conditions. They wanted proof that the village was permanent and required that there be a certain amount of initiative shown on the part of the community toward establishing its own school before the Department would aid. Case history gave instances of villages asking for schools, then shortly afterward the settlement being vacated leaving closed buildings standing as silent monuments to ingratitude.

An old flag in Chief's cache mutely testified to a similar event in Nikolai history. About thirty-five years before a teacher had been sent there at the request of white trappers in the locality and his coming was with the consent of the native populace. The young man, however, lasted only a few weeks on the job. He was ousted by the people who had suddenly decided they did not need to learn books. Back of their action was a person in the area at that time whose

occupation won him the title of "bean agent." That trader knew the education of the natives would hurt his business because in their ignorance they believed him implicitly. He quoted what prices he would, gathering in valuable furs as if they were rabbit skins. A generation had paid.

We had talked over this school problem before. We talked it over again, then decided on a village meeting. When a few men came back to Nikolai for more supplies, we snatched the opportunity to have a conference to discuss the new school. We were fully in sympathy with the stand taken by the Juneau office and our people seemed to be persuaded likewise.

At length we reached an agreement—we hoped. With the help of churches at home, we would furnish windows, roofing, nails and other material that had to be purchased. The natives would get logs and erect a building. Settled. Chief assured us that we would find the work started when we returned in the fall.

The second week of June we left our village, bringing to a close our first winter's work. A handful of people stood on the river bank watching us leave in the small boat with a family and their dogs. At last comfortably seated, or at least seated, we took count. Ten people and an equal number of malemutes. The day was warm and passengers were in a cheerful frame of mind. We never said much, mostly nodded, smiled and pointed at what we wanted the next person to see. We had little to say because the dogs, who were in the process of losing their winter coats, were in the bow of the boat and we in the stern. To open our mouths at the wrong moment, meant receiving unwanted dog hair.

We stayed overnight at The Landing and the following morning transferred to the trader's boat for the remainder of the trip. We would go on to McGrath with Bertha who

was going down for a load of supplies. Second Chief, who knew the channel well, was pilot and guide.

Arriving at McGrath in early evening, we were met by the Phillips. They suggested that Mildred and I transfer to their boat right away and be taken to "Old McGrath" across the river. There Pete, an old sourdough, lay dying of cancer and having heard we were coming, he had asked to see us. We certainly wanted to see him.

His cabin defied description, its very walls reeking of liquor. Pete was like his cabin. He had been a character in more ways than one, but that did not keep us from liking him. Everyone liked Pete. True, he often wore his shoes on wrong feet and his mustache and beard were frozen often with you-know-what, but behind it and forever cropping out was personality. Every kind heart in town took time out to visit him when he could no longer go about.

As we stood beside his cot, we were without words we wanted. He was dying and knew it. We wanted to explain again the way of salvation. We wanted to ask him about his soul and to have assurance that all was well. Our efforts were futile. In the crude language of the North, he was "pickled against pain" and consequently unable to comprehend much of what anyone said.

We faced one of those moments when a minister or Christian worker is at a loss for anything to say. Would that people would make their decisions for Christ when their minds are clear and their senses responsive! Only the day before his stroke he had been in the little chapel and had requested songs of his early childhood. Now he lay conscious only at intervals. How was his soul? These were questions none could answer. We could do nothing but trust to the mercies of God who alone reads the fine print of each human heart.

EIGHT :-: A Great Construction Project

CONTRASTS. Alaska has them. Twice the size of Texas it has that much more in extremes. These extremes, however, are not confined to the historical and the geographical. College graduates work beside illiterate natives. Seated at the same lunch counter are nurse, ex-boxer, engineer, dish washer, and artist—Alaska. Amazing differences are forgotten in a common bond, that of pioneering the forty-ninth state.

Alaskans told how the summers go by quickly, too quickly. By the end of June we had chimed in, complaining that we had not enough weeks for all we wanted to do. We went to Anchorage to have vacation Bible school, then were off to a youth camp somewhere out in the wilds, miles from any place of which we had ever heard. Being the first year in that particular spot, the camp had only temporary shelters and tents instead of buildings. Giant mosquitoes drove off some of the would-be vacationers, but those of us who managed to stay found relaxation from the speed of daily living.

The road to camp wound through the Matanuska Valley that the federal government settled in the twenties and thirties. They sent families to colonize and to homestead; their farms today prove that dairying in Alaska is possible. As the car jogged along over the nothing-to-brag-about highway, we saw a cow. We had not seen a cow since we were on the "S. S. Aleutian" on our way North from Seattle. I remembered how sorry I was then for the two

cows we saw tied out on the lower deck. They bawled when we were crossing the Gulf and little wonder! Two-thirds of the passengers were seasick, and I don't know that animals are exempt from such experiences. This Matanuska cow was contented, and we asked the driver of the car to stop so we could get a good look at Bossy. There was Matanuska Glacier too, but the cow impressed me more.

I left camp early to return to Anchorage en route to Seward sanitarium to see little Martha. Our Anchorage home was with the Rossignols at the church parsonage. I went to my suitcase in the closet to get city clothes. I opened my suitcase: it was empty. Who would steal my clothes?

Mrs. Rossignol walked into the room and began rather apologetically, "I was sure you wouldn't mind —. Well, it's like this. I took your clothes. I didn't think you would be back so soon and I figured I'd have them all done up —."

"You mean you washed them?"

"Yes I did. They weren't dirty, you understand. I knew they were clean, but I was doing a washing and I put them in." Then she added, "Look, I know you don't know it, but you smelled like moss, like the village. I just couldn't stand it."

I laughed. People who write ads don't know what best friends *will* tell. Ten months of living in an old cabin, putting wood in the Yukon stove, and living close to mother earth had left its mark. While the smell of smoked moosehide, dried fish, and decaying moss can become happy reminders of the village one loves, carrying such smells to town is something else.

I flew down to Seward to see Martha. When I walked into the room she looked up with a happy smile. We talked, for she now spoke English well and she told me about her new friends and the goings-on around the hospital. She

asked about the village, but with no hint of wanting to return. In between the lines I read the reason. She had milk to drink and all the oranges she wanted. Martha had learned to like "city food."

We like to talk about how things of this earth don't matter. It sounds nice and they should not rule our lives, but they matter. Take hamburgers for an instance, not heavenly, strictly of this earth, but in Nikolai we missed hamburgers. I thought I could never again get enough, with lettuce and tomatoes. We carried the fixings of more back to McGrath so we and the Phillips could have a real spread.

Back on the Kuskokwim again! It was with renewal of our old enthusiasm that we looked toward the familiar landscape that separated us from our adopted village. The scheduled plane from Bethel was due in and one of its passengers was to be Elsie May Smith, an Alaska Native Service worker. We had never met her, but we had heard much about her work. She had written us that she wanted to visit our village to take a census for her records as well as to get firsthand information on living conditions in Nikolai.

As she alighted from the two-motored plane, we walked to meet her.

"I believe you are Miss Smith?"

"Yes, but how did you know?"

"We are the Nikolai teachers and we knew you were coming."

"Yes, but how did you know that I am Miss Smith?" she insisted.

Know it? How could we help but know it? Her devotion to her work with the natives and years of village living had become a part of her. She was a plain little woman, radiating a friendly warmth that assured us we would not have to apologize for our cabin and its lack of conveniences. We

also recognized quickly that she was a capable person; we would not have to tell her what to do. She would probably tell us.

We went by bush plane to The Landing where we gleaned village news from the traders. We fairly tingled with excitement, for this was the fall we were to build the new school and part of the supplies had already gone before us. Pearl had given us a price on roofing and other material that could hardly be called a price at all. It was a gift. The Stewarts, who at one time contemplated building a store in the village, gave us their new logs which were only a mile or so from Nikolai. They also gave us an old cabin purchased from one of the village men and located in the village, but good only for firewood. At the mercies of our people for most of that wood, we were grateful for the dry logs.

There was Pete's Yukon stove. Shortly before the old man died he told the Phillips that he wanted the Nikolai girls to have it. It had served him well and the flat top was good for cooking on as well as for heating a room. He was proud of it and we should have it. I wished that I could keep it forever. After all, people don't go around willing us things, particularly stoves. Practical Mildred knew that once it was in the village, it would serve out its term of usefulness there regardless of our travels.

The thirty miles up river came on a rainy, drizzly day. The Kuskokwim was swollen with contributions from its tributaries. The river banks had all they could do to hold the fast-moving water in check and we could see that the journey ahead would be tough. Andrew Dennis cheerfully consented to take us in his boat that already had four passengers, but always room for one more, you know. He had two boats tied together and was planning on picking up another family with household goods a few miles upstream.

His were not covered boats, but he improvised. Bent willows formed the crude framework over which he stretched old tarps giving a covered wagon effect. Stopping at the fish camp, we added to our load making a total of seven adults, five children, two dogs, and junk galore. A little canoe trailed behind.

We took what seemed the long way home. Water got into the gas of the outboard motors and for several miles the two motors took turns stopping. Being tied together, one boat always managed to keep going and we made progress, slow as it was. Suddenly, fulfilling our fears, both motors gave a few rebellious kicks at the same time and we came to a dead stop, but only for a second. Then we were going back downstream with the current. Using oars, the men managed to shove in close enough to the bank for us to reach out and grab willows to keep us from drifting farther. While we held on, Andrew worked with the motors and finally had them going again.

Shortly before nightfall we reached Nikolai. With grass three feet high and barely a trail to mark the paths, the village appeared deserted. Then we spotted smoke curling from our chimney. We had left a key with Slim and upon hearing our motors in the distance he had gone in and built a fire. During the weeks we were away someone had even taken care to weed a few spots in our garden.

"What a pretty little cabin," remarked Miss Smith.

Pretty? We were about to protest, but the flowers stopped us. We had planted brave nasturtiums around our log house and the riot of color against the deep brown was worthy of comment.

We opened the door of our cabin and entered. I sniffed the air. Just as I remembered—strange odor of old wood, damp cardboard and a past history of plenty of liquor in

the roadhouse. It'll tell you a lot, sometimes more than you want to know.

We were cold and hungry, but the room warmed up quickly and Slim had seen to it that there was fresh water. Numbness gradually oozed out of our bones so we felt ready to plunge into work. Instead of being overrun with callers, we had only a few at a time. Our people knew we had company so were careful to knock at the door. So they did remember some of what we had taught them and we were pleased. Like a doting parent, I looked inside myself and knew I was downright proud of them.

Anna Alexie came in to see us the following morning, bringing her two small boys. Their clothes were clean and their hair neatly combed. She whispered something to them and they crossed the room to where Miss Smith was seated. Nikolai extended his right hand, then Bernie did the same. That took a lot of courage. Miss Smith shook hands with the manly little fellows, expressing her surprise at their timid friendliness. She was no more surprised than we who knew that a few months before they would have been a pair of runny noses hiding behind their mother's skirt.

Until late afternoon when the plane on floats came for Miss Smith, she spent her time taking a census and gathering pertinent facts about the village. She liked our people and they liked her. As a result we had no difficulty getting them to cooperate. A few of the families were as clear as anyone could be on birthdays and ages, but others were not so sure. Stiff arguments arose as to who was older than who. We settled the tiff by giving a day, month, and year to someone to call his own. I gave old Miska Nikolai my birthday—only a different year—just for fun. Some of our folk got the sudden notion to change their names for the files, but Miss Smith talked them out of that. We could have

thought they had been reading movie magazines, wanting to pull that trick.

Through Miss Smith's efforts we were able to secure welfare help for the blind man and his family as well as for others partly disabled. We were careful, however, to whom we gave because giving financial aid can be overdone. In many villages unwed mothers are given an amount for each child. The motive may be all right, but the end result is often tragic. "Government he want me have these kids. That why he pay me." Try to reason with such a person! Next to liquor, pensioning these real Alaskans has done as much harm as anything the white man has introduced. Failing to equip the native to provide for himself robs him of his confidence and also contributes to his delinquency.

Increasing the earning power of our Alaskans is a long-range project, a goal not to be reached over a period of a few short months. They can, nevertheless, be taught to live better within their present economic bracket. At that goal we aimed our gardening. Interior Alaska's growing season may be too short for some vegetables, but others such as carrots, beets, and cabbage outdo themselves. With twenty-four hours of daylight, the growth of plant life is phenomenal. A blade pushing through the ground has been carefully measured and known to grow a full two inches from one morning to the next.

The other two gardeners in the village did all right their first year. Mrs. Skogomy's potatoes carried the blue ribbon. My potatoes were scabby. We had no pigs to feed them to, so we ate them. Mrs. Skogomy felt sorry for us and gave some of hers. She and Anna talked about bigger and better gardens next year.

Our village had no funerals during our absence. That is a cruel yardstick by which to measure health, but we knew that every summer saw the burial of two or three children.

Conditions in the village were steadily improving, even the surface of the village was cleaner. Women's missionary groups at home sent boxes of clothing and that along with constant hammering on the importance of dressing right resulted in children having fewer colds. The two garden patches on the south slope were also an investment in future health. The families who tended them were acquiring tastes that would demand some catering. That also went for the less ambitious who begged a head of cabbage now and then. Unimpressed by vitamin charts, they evaluated food by "good with moosemeat."

However, something will always be close to you to prod you on. Though none had died during the summer, Deaphan, Anna's three-months-old baby, was literally starving to death. He was all bones and had a bloated potbelly and a mouth wide open most of the time. He cried night and day so his parents and six other children in the same room had little or no sleep.

When we asked his mother what was wrong, she told us his milk would not stay down. "My David, she die same way," she added quietly.

Didn't she even care? We watched her. Yes, she did, but what could she do about it? What if she had screamed and torn her hair? That would not save her baby. She would not waste her strength in grief. She had been through this before and she knew. Sometimes our people's stoicism disturbed us, but we had no right to accuse.

As Christians we cannot remain completely passive about needs before us. If we cannot do anything else, we can pray, and that in itself is a measure of doing. Day after day I prepared oatmeal gruel, strained it carefully, and took it to Anna to feed her baby. We prayed. The oatmeal stayed down and the family rested from the continual day and

night crying. The village had planned on it, but they did not get to dig a small grave that September.

The men did some other digging, however. Chief came one morning with a quicker step than usual. He didn't exactly come bounding into our cabin. Let's say he sauntered fast.

"Where you put school?" he asked.

"Where?"

"Yaah."

Where? Let's see. We had to think that one over a minute. Our villagers had failed to keep their promise about starting on the new building during the summer. We were beginning to fear they would never get at it. Chief's question brought us new hope. We discussed the location. We tried to be diplomatic and discuss it with him, but he only said, "Yaah." We were not too particular where the school should be built, for no surveyor ever saw the likes of Nikolai, but we did want it on a fairly high spot. Low places take so long to dry out in the spring.

Chief became impatient. "Come with me." (Any time you will come out with a complete sentence, sir, gladly will we follow.) He led us to a level spot overlooking the South Fork. To our amazement, a number of men were already at work. Judging from the area cleared, they had been at it a couple of hours. Chief did not want to know *where* the new school building should be; he wanted to call our attention to the fact that he had the ball rolling.

That gave reason for another vacation. Primarily it was a buying trip to get windows and nails. Since we had to go as far as The Landing anyway, we decided to take advantage of the opportunity to hike on out to Eagle Creek Mine, a distance of eight or ten miles over muskeg, moss, and merciful patches of terra firma.

Bob and Dorothy Stone and their son, John, made the

trip with us to their place. We would have become lost if alone. Bob was a Texan in search of a larger state and found Alaska. His capable wife was an Alaskan in a truer sense of the word. She was part native and had all that one person could have of their deft fingers and imaginative art. That combined with American ambition made her a tremendous worker. Hers was also a wholesome, happy disposition and a face full of light. You couldn't help but watch her when she laughed.

We enjoyed our long hike with the friendly trio and not one complained. Miles of rugged terrain and heavy boots wearing blisters on your heels can be fun when you have the right traveling companions. We moved ahead at an easy pace. No hurry. We couldn't have hurried over those acres of accordion moss (moss and low brush a few feet deep) if we had wanted to do it. With every step we sank down twelve or eighteen inches and the next step had to be up as well as forward. Mildred and I kept losing our balance, much to the delight of the teen-ager who practically grew up in the stuff and knew how to prance right across. We were glad when the trail led over something resembling hard ground. Occasionally we stopped to rest on an old log or on a hard clump of grass found near the swamps. Then Dorothy would laughingly hand us a bottle of insect repellent with a merry "Freshen up with 6-12!" It was powerful stuff that *repelled*.

Mosquitoes in Alaska are no small problem, moving in armies. One lone mortal with only two arms hasn't a chance. The worst comes when you open your mouth for a good laugh, and inhale sharply. You cough while someone slaps you on the back and shouts, "Spit it out!"

After four hours we emerged on a clearing in the wilderness. The Stones' cabin is the pioneer's dream. Rustic, but not shabby. Most of the cabins in our village

were fast approaching the caving-in stage, but here was the homesteader's dream. Carefully we made mental note of the way the windows were set in, the pitch of the roof, and so on. We wanted a good-looking schoolhouse and would be architects if necessary. The Stones became amused when they heard us. Kindly they told us not to worry. Our Second Chief had built the stairway in the trader's home at The Landing, a project that baffled non-native carpenters. Bertha wanted a stairway from the kitchen and a stairway from the living room to merge into one leading to the upstairs. When no one else could do it, Second Chief sized up the job and said he could and he did. Read and write? "No, he can't that kind."

In front of Stone's cabin ran Eagle Creek, a tiny stream you could wade or jump across. It was Dorothy's refrigerator. When she wanted to keep food from spoiling, she put it in a jar which she set in the cold water. Perfect. Flowers bloomed against the cabin and on the sunny side was a crisp vegetable garden. The shady side of the cabin almost pushed against the hill where the gold mine was located. A short ramble up the hillside is the "ice cream mine," a deep crack in the rock. At the bottom of it lies snow from the past winter. How handy.

Inside the cabin was as much a picture as outside. Dorothy had made a lamp base of moose hooves, and towel racks of twisted and gnarled willow limbs carefully peeled and sanded. The guest room was separate from the rest of the house—a board floor tent in the front yard. At night we crawled into cozy flannel-lined sleeping bags made of bear skins. I was not too sure I wanted to crawl into mine at first, but neither was I about to sit on top of it and freeze all night. Frankly, I was a bit scared of it. Mildred said that was silly. Once I got inside I forgot about Mr. Bear as I

listened to the wind in the trees and the yawning cries of the sled dogs.

The next day we visited the mine. It wasn't in operation, but we went through real official-like, wearing miners' caps with the light on the front. Then we panned for gold with pans made of oil drums. Standard Oil containers are more important than their products! We picked berries and "lazier" in the sun. In the evenings we played games while Bob drawled out stories of the old days when Nikolai figured as a stop for the mail teams. No longer important for geographical reasons, Nikolai remains important because people are there. Yet we knew that our village was on the decline and it would be nonexistent in time if it failed to recognize its opportunities. We had confidence our people were waking up.

Missionaries are sometimes the target of strong accusations that they are trying to lift the native out of his "ignorance-is-bliss" state. They are blamed for taking from him the glories of tribal customs and investing him with only a meager portion of civilization so-called, enough to ruin his happiness and endanger his health. "Before the coming of the whites," the accusers say, "these people weren't dying by the hundreds with T. B. They lived off the land and it afforded all that they actually needed." To this anyone must concede a point, but unfortunately the native is usually on a downhill grade and gaining momentum before the missionary reaches him.

Other white people have already arrived, and their tobacco and sugar, used in sickening proportions, demand more than the blueberry to counteract their effect. Liquor is worse, ripping the moral fiber off the people until they stoop so low their own sin kills them. The church militant of which we sing is all too often trying to go in with a late cure. We could accomplish more by marching ahead of the

unbeliever rather than tagging behind at his heels. Aren't there missionaries who are not true missionaries? Haven't missionaries made some mistakes? Yes, of course, they have. So have doctors, but I'm not for getting rid of them.

Mildred and I would have liked to stay at the mine with the Stones longer, but the more we talked about our village the deeper grew our urge to return and work. We trudged back to The Landing and thumbed a ride on one of the boats going to Nikolai.

As we neared the village, "Do you see what I see?"

Several rounds of logs were in place. Our new school was in construction and its progress was a joy to watch. We, together with a group of children, did our part by tramping to the woods for moss. It grew several inches deep. We tore it loose from the musty earth and filled gunnysacks. Throwing the sacks over our shoulders, we tramped back and emptied our loot in a pile and turned again toward the woods. We made more trips than I care to count. The builders used our moss for chinking and later demanded layers of it for the roof.

After the walls were up about seven feet, the two gable ends went up. Across these the workers laid heavy log beams. Instead of the usual boards for the sub-roofing, the carpenters laid split poles side by side to make the first layer of the four-ply roof. The second layer was this precious moss. While the men were spreading it around, the big boys were digging into the sandy soil and filling their wheelbarrows. From an embankment on the north side of the building, they put planks to be used as tramways to the roof. The boys wheeled their loads up and dumped them, and the men shoveled the dirt around, spreading it evenly over the moss until they had several inches of insulation. When the men gave word that they had enough, the boys handed up sheets of tin roofing. When that was all put

down, they had a roofing job that would last many winters and hold its own against any March wind.

We did not wait for the completion of the new building to begin our second year of school. Though all of our people were not in from fish camps, we started school with an enrollment of seventeen. Through the efforts of the McGrath teacher, the Department of Education at Juneau had come to our rescue with more supplies. Their interest resulted in new interest among our natives. "Government he send that? That pretty good." We thought so too.

Mildred promoted all her pupils to the second grade. My children all remained in kindergarten or were given a weak try at first-grade work. I looked longingly toward the other side of the room where they used brand-new material while we wrestled with the old flash cards. During the summer months some had even forgotten their colors. After a couple of weeks of review, however, the realization that they were back in school seemed to dawn. Fresh from contact with other children, I experimented with new teaching methods. We introduced books of nursery rhymes, but they went over like lead balloons. The pictures amused momentarily, but the verses confused them completely. We had enough to teach of the practical without delving into the abstract. I could not explain "hey-diddle-diddle" and when I told my children that the phrase did not have a meaning, they gave me a look that meant, "Then why learn it?" I didn't know.

School days were busy days, but Sunday mornings we had to ourselves as the entire village went to service in the Russian Church. During one of these relaxed hours we heard a plane buzz over the village. We went outdoors and saw a Seabee land on the water and then crawl onto the sandy beach of the island in our river. By this time two of the men who had left church motioned us to get into boats with them. We crossed over to meet the visitors, Kenneth Clem

from the Juneau office, Ed Chamberlain from the McGrath school, and a pilot.

They had come to see our village and to learn more about our infant school. They were with us about three hours, talking with our villagers and combing thoroughly the few acres that comprise Nikolai. They talked with our leaders, asking them and us more questions than could be answered. The longer you live in a village, the less you know. So much of living depends upon factors over which you have no control and which certainly you cannot predict. Even school attendance depended upon weather, the price of furs in New York, and how many fish were in the river.

The newcomers were attracted to the quaint cemetery just as we had been when we arrived. At last came a question we could answer.

"Why the three bars on the Russian Cross?" Mr. Clem asked.

"There is more than one interpretation of that, but the Russian Church book we have explains the first bar as representing the inscription, 'This is the King of the Jews.' The second bar is the crosspiece on which the arms of Jesus were extended asking a lost world to come to Him, and the lower bar is a footpiece placed at a slant as a reminder that one thief made Heaven and the other one went to Hell."

"Very interesting," Mr. Clem commented. "Their cross looks strange to a western world only because it is not understood. I suppose if you stayed in a village a while, you would feel just as at home as anywhere else."

Home; we invited them to ours. Mildred, who never has to apologize for her cooking, had just made some cinnamon rolls. We had coffee and rolls while we leaned on the table to discuss school plans. Inwardly we cringed at the way our room looked. My sagging cot had come up in the world. Clover and Art Farrance from McGrath had given us double-

bed springs and a mattress. Until we could get moved, we had no place to store the second bed except on top of my first one. It was so high and hung over so awkwardly that I used a chair to climb onto it at night. I had to make a leap for the very center of the bed for fear my weight on the edge would unbalance the whole thing. Were there a superlative to the word clutter, that word would describe our room, but we were silently grateful for little blessings. We were grateful that our handsome dog was not still tied in the middle of the room.

Seated around the table, we talked over the future of our school. We expressed desire that the school become territorial as we had no wishes to establish a parochial school. We were, strictly speaking, not teachers, but where the Gospel goes, people should be benefited both spiritually and physically.

Our visitors' interest in our dozen projects was heartening, and the fact that they cared about our village gave us a lift. It's easy back in the bush country to get the notion that all the rest of the world is having a "hip-hooray" time and you are alone, poor and sort of misunderstood. Of course, you don't feel down always, but you do have moments. Cabin fever isn't a joke.

Though he most assuredly did not realize it, Mr. Clem's hearty "Amen!" after Mildred asked the blessing at the table sounded in our ears for days. After they left we talked repeatedly of their visit and about the "Amen." One word, like good news from a far country. I promised that if I ever found my way to a town church, I was going to appreciate *every* Christian I met.

NINE :- The Big Moving Day

WE LIKED Second Chief even though he was smart, for there was nothing wrong with being smart, but he irritated others. "Me learn to read? Me go Old Timer's school? Naw! Me know more all rest you guys together." Second Chief was good-hearted and there was much in him to be appreciated.

On an informal occasion around the old Yukon stove, Second Chief announced that he would like to hear a man "tell Story." Mildred and I harbored no hurt feelings over this preference. The ministry is primarily a man's job.

We gradually discontinued telling Bible stories in school. We kept Sunday and Friday nights open for everyone to come to Story. We passed out song books at the start of evening meetings, carefully giving the number and waiting until everyone had found the page. Though no one could read well enough to follow the meaning completely, the better students found words here and there and thus added new ones to their vocabularies. Our efforts were rewarded when they took bigger bites of learning.

After the meetings were dismissed, the folk usually remained a while. They chatted quietly among themselves or worked on the jigsaw puzzles on the table. That may hardly seem like a fitting climax to Story, but we were in the school-room and if they didn't work a puzzle, they would look at books. Second Chief liked to wait until everyone had gone. Then he gave his fascinating stories. Mildred and I strained

at every word to grasp exactly what he was saying, but not for the world would we let our minds wander.

I can hear him even now, "Long time ago. I don't know how many year. I was boy that time. Man come, come from far away. She take boat from Bethel maybe. She stay long time. He talk our language so we hear him. Every day he tell story. Like you tell. Then we have meeting down by the river. She appatiza the people. O, she was good. Everyone he feel good that time. He tell us lots and everyone happy. That time. Then 'nother time. I bigger boy that time. Help my old mother with wood and trap. One day I get tired. I can't stay wake. I sleep. My mother wake me up. She say, 'Eat. I fix you soup.' I turn over, I's too tired. I sleep many days. Couple time she wake me 'nough to put little soup in my mouth. Pretty soon, two, three week go by. I sleep. That's all.

"Then priest come. We don't know that man. She come and mother she tell him I sick and only sleep all time. She say she pray for me. Priest he come to where I sleep. He pray. I wake up. I say, 'Mother, you got soup. I hungry.' She bring soup and I eat and I get up. No more sleep. Like that I never sleep again. Priest he go away. We don't know where come from. After that time I okay. Lots a time I think that priest, I wish he come back."

Who was this "priest?" We do not know. He might have been from the Mission Covenant group on the lower Kuskokwim, or from the Moravian mission at Bethel, or from the Russian Mission. The stranger who prayed for Second Chief may even have been a trapper or a prospector, a Christian layman who knew how to pray. Perhaps no one can now identify him. Church records would fail to tell of a hazardous journey over miles of river and tundra; but in the great Book of God there is a name — his name.

That stranger went his way never to return, but his faith

left an indelible print, undoubtedly one of the factors that made Second Chief exceptionally open to spiritual things. He never missed a Story if he could help it. Though he would not attend night classes himself, he was forever plugging for the school children. That in turn helped pave the way for a coming generation to have the opportunities their elders had missed.

Some weeks later Mildred read from the Bible of the beauties of Heaven. Second Chief listened intently and he made a picture, stone grey hair neatly combed and handsome coppery face radiant with happiness, the happiness of remembering. Later he said, "That true. I know that place." He proceeded to tell us in minute detail what his first wife had told him shortly before she passed away. She saw a beautiful country and the description he gave left us speechless. Coupled with incidents out of her life told by other natives, (and she was dearly loved), convinced us that she knew Christ. Perhaps it was a traveler going through on the mail team years ago that had given her truths that remained. No follow-up work and all this the village as a whole had lost, lost in a measure. A pebble dropped on the water makes a ripple — smaller and smaller with time and distance, but who marks where it stops?

Near the Russian church stood a small building which the people told us was the old church. It was made of logs, a birchbark roof overlapped like shingles. The villagers decided to tear it down. In the process they came across a rough, hand-hewn board over the door. On it was printed in large irregular letters, "HOUSE OF GOD WELCOME." Apparently, since the words were in English, someone had been there before the Russian Church put its claim on the small building. For all our questioning, we were unable to trace the maker of the sign. The workmen also found a paper with Russian writing. We sent to the University of

Alaska for a translation thinking it might be historical. The paper proved to be a receipt for a bill paid and no one knew the persons involved.

Rev. Mr. Changsak, the priest who had visited the village the previous April, returned to stay for several days. He came to our cabin and talked with us for an hour or two. He expressed his hopes for the village and his appreciation of what was being done. When a group of youngsters planned to skip school, using his services as an excuse, he firmly pointed them to our classroom.

"I told them," he said in relating the incident, "if you want church that bad, I'll have it after school."

Came the great moving day and the big push was on. School was dismissed and from the excitement you would have thought we were launching a rocket to the moon. The school was moving and so were we. Desks and other furniture our big boys pulled by sled to the new building. We and the younger children loaded our arms with boxes, cooking utensils, and anything else within reach. The new building was roughly eighteen by twenty-one feet with a long row of windows on the south. That feature alone had a bearing on all future cabins in the village. One who at the time knew he would not be building a new home for some time went that very week to The Landing for another window for his cabin. "Make it like school." The long winters have precious little light without deliberately closing it out with walls.

We squeezed into one corner and called it home, putting up a partition to make a bedroom. Our hopes were for a teacherage the following year. In the meantime, we would make the most of what we had, hanging our clothes on nails and stringing lines behind the stove for drying purposes. We cut down a gas can and made a brand-new shiny

ash-catcher for the front of the stove. Mildred took out a crocheted doily for the center of her steamer trunk.

Last of all we assembled the desks and seats discarded by the McGrath school and given to Nikolai. Since we did not have the benefit of instruction sheets, only memory told us which end was up on the ornamental pieces of iron. We mixed and matched and came out with some rather out-of-proportion seats, but seats nevertheless. Woe be to the idle one who entered our doors. He found himself working in spite of intentions. Once started, he would stay with the job simply because it was a challenge to one's ingenuity. It's rough on the pride to be beaten by an inanimate object so most of the furniture was put together. I know where there are a few leftover pieces, but they defy matching.

In the midst of these activities came a less cheerful note. The Department of Health in Anchorage wrote me that my Xray reading of that summer showed a shadow on my lungs. They advised that I get in as soon as possible for another Xray and further tests, if necessary. We knew what that meant. I moaned around about it and felt quite sorry for myself. Besides, I didn't want to go to town. I was happy and busy. On the other hand, I owed it to Mildred to go to a doctor. She should not have the extra worry and I certainly should not be giving her my germs. Yes, I would go.

I went to Anchorage where I had another Xray taken. It showed no shadow whatever. The only cause for concern was that I was running a slight temperature. The doctor was in a hurry and he did not count the pain in my chest as anything to be alarmed about. The temperature? Well, he didn't know. What I did not find out then, and perhaps it is as well, was that my heart was complaining at long and strenuous hours. It had a right to protest. The work would not get lighter. Our people were becoming more used to us, consequently more neglectful of our water pails.

We hurriedly insert that we had not been entirely without fault. We were keyed to a terrific pitch. We loved our people and at times we overdid. We kept going from early morning till late evening and the hours after Tundra Topics, when we should have laid our work aside, we wrote letters. I begged Mildred for a change of pattern. I wanted to type carbon copies and postscript a personal note. I didn't mean to be ungrateful and unappreciative of what folk back home were doing for us, but I was tired.

Being less than an hour by air from Seward, I went to see Martha in the sanitarium. The social medical worker there had written the family regularly, and from her letters we knew our girl was not making great strides physically. She did seem to be holding her own and we held out hope for her recovery, hope based on love rather than fact.

I stepped into Martha's room. She looked up at me and exclaimed, "I'm so happy here."

Little wonder. Nurses fluttered around her, other patients spoiled her, and visitors catered to her. The shelf above her bed was lined with dolls. Pictures and books were within reach, and on the stand by her bed was a goldfish bowl. Her thin fingers played with the fish. There was no doubt about it, she was having a royal time.

I left Martha, completely satisfied that we had done the right thing in placing her in the hospital. I knew it all the time, yet I had my moments of doubt. Was she homesick? What the missionaries in Seward had written was true — she was a happy child.

Mildred had her struggles while alone that week. When I met her at the door of our schoolhouse I blurted out, "And you've been sick."

"How do you know?"

"Oh, I can tell. How do you feel now?"

"I'm better though I had to dismiss school while you were gone. It hit me right after you left."

I suspected part of her trouble was nerves. I regretted that I had had to leave her for so long and I was grateful for those villagers who had made her work lighter and had even gone to The Landing for fresh eggs for her.

I got back into harness. Our second winter had definite advantages over our first. For one, we felt closer to the rest of the world with a mail plane arriving each week. We dismissed classes when planes came, partly in consideration of the children. I was postmistress, and besides I liked meeting planes. When we heard one coming, we literally poured out of the building. The younger children had to really look out so we made a ruling that our pupils be properly dismissed instead of everyone making a mad dash without warning. We hated to inflict rules on these children of the wind, but the restraint saved our little cherubs from getting trampled on. Also, it prevented anyone from bounding out on false alarm which happened more than once when Damoska, whose voice was in the process of changing to a definite bass, read in a loud whisper. Another time we temporarily lost half of our class because someone's stomach growled.

Whenever possible we taught by doing, so I guess our children never suffered too much. Mildred's class read about kites so she helped them make kites. Before the day was over we dismissed classes and the entire village, adults included, were flying kites. Another time we made flour, putting wheat in our hand grinder and letting the children do the work. After the wheat was ground, they sifted it to make white flour. The next time they read about a mill, they had some idea of what the story was about.

They also read about cats and many of them had never seen a cat. We tried to explain. "Cat is like marten." That they understood, but could not appreciate as a pet. "How

does a cut purr? Like a little motor inside. You be real nice to cat then you listen and you hear motor." I told them that some day we would get a kitten, and then they could all listen to the motor.

My pupils got by with doing less work during our second year of school. I never demanded as much because of an incident that took place the previous spring. It concerned Bella. Bella was about ten years old, small for her age and shy. She was also slower to learn than her sisters, but because I did not want them to pass her up, I tried to shove her ahead. When I gave spelling words or carefully guided her hand in writing, she was cooperative as a child could be. I sensed that sometimes she was becoming a bit nervous, but I thought we were getting along all right.

One morning as I stood by her desk, she looked up at me and smiled. It was the same sweet smile she had given me before. Her eyes were shining and I saw they were filled with tears. Brave little Bella. She could stand the pressure I had placed upon her no longer. My exactness was more than she could take. Burying her face in her hands, she sobbed as if her heart was broken. I stood there for one awful moment. I had meant to help, but I had hurt. I wanted to cry with her, but instead I reached down, swept her up in my arms, and carried her into our room. There I gave her pictures and a few beat-up toys to play with until she got over her frustration.

After that none of my children was pressed as before. Bella had taught me something of values. The happiness of my children comes first. If they are happy, they will learn either because of or in spite of me. Bella did her work just as well without my goading and I am much quicker now to give a grade for effort even if the end result is not up to my expectation.

A village school is more than a school. It is everything

from government agency to clinic. In early November we were surprised by a visit from two Alaska Native Service nurses, Esther Schaubel and Ruth Grover. They had not warned us of their coming mostly because their stop in Nikolai was a spur-of-the-moment decision. They had a full enough schedule without including us, but someone who knew of our village had suggested that they come our way if they could. The women introduced themselves and said they wanted to get right to work. We figured that meant tomorrow, but as soon as lunch dishes were off the table they were setting up their clinic. They never concerned themselves with their lack of white uniforms or our lack of conveniences. We tried to apologize, but our words were waved away with, "Oh, this isn't bad. Wait till you see how we do in a fish camp."

They were a jolly pair. Esther had spent years in Alaska and knew the villages and its people well. The scars we thought were caused accidentally she recognized for what they were; bleeding a patient is considered an effective cure for almost anything. Because she knew their customs, our people responded to her queries and gave information we would have been years in getting.

Our natives were not used to taking shots. Mrs. Skogomy pushed back her sleeve and held out her arm for the dreaded jab, beads of perspiration on her upper lip. Ruth, the younger nurse, was taking a test and as the blood entered the glass tube, she laughed gaily. "How nice and dark. Been eating blueberries again, huh?"

A titter went through the line of adults. They relaxed, quietly talking among themselves, and stepping up for their shots without any more signs of fear. Surely Ruth, though a nurse, was as human as they.

When the rush of poking people was over, we asked Anna Alexie to bring little Deaphan, our oatmeal baby. After

weeks of preparing gruel for him, I had suggested to his mother that she cook for him herself. Later she told us that she was giving all her children mush for breakfast. They used to come to school on a cup of tea or a dry biscuit. The difference in their school work was almost unbelievable. I told Esther and Ruth about my simple prescription for the baby and felt good all over when they said that was the best we could have done under the circumstances. They gave his mother some medicine for him and told her to keep giving the oatmeal. After she left, they confided that we had perhaps prolonged his life by a month or two, but that he had been starved too long. It was hoping against hope that he should live.

We also introduced to the nurses our Jane Doe. Her story dated back to a year before we arrived in Alaska. Her real name was Helen and she was then about three years old, the youngest of seven children. The family lived in Telida village at the time and their little Helen was a sickly child, unable to walk. Her parents had no idea what was wrong with her or what they should do. One day a bush pilot stopped at the village and the natives asked him to take the child to a hospital. He accommodated, taking her to the Alaska Service Hospital at Tanana where he left her.

He must have been in a hurry, for those in charge got no information on the child, her name, or even where she lived. She went down on their records as Jane Doe. They cared for her, treated her for rheumatic fever, brought her back to health, and hoped that some day someone would claim her.

When her family moved to Nikolai to enroll their children in school, the father told us her story. "You can write. For me you write. Write Tanana. Ask him if he have my girl."

We wrote and received an immediate reply from the doctor in charge who was happy to learn that someone wanted

their Jane Doe. Within a few days she was flown to our village and reunited with her family.

All this had to go on health records and the next day the nurses resumed their work. Of the tuberculin tests given, only eight were negative and could take BCG. Of course, that did not mean all the others had tuberculosis, but it was evidence of a contact. After close association with these people, standing over fevered children in school, and listening to the dry, hollow coughs when they exerted themselves, we conservatively estimated that one in every five had the disease. Little wonder we jumped at the chance for health classes or whatever help the nurses might be able to give when they offered to return after the holidays. When they left, they had no doubt as to our wanting them to return.

As a pre-Christmas treat, we took the children for a hike out the Telida trail to look for a tree. The tree we finally chose was a sad-looking spruce with knobby limbs and one side so bare that we stood it flat against the wall. No matter. By the time two dozen children got through decorating it, the scrubby arms would be well covered. We had promised a party in the evening and Mildred said she wanted to bake a birthday cake.

I weakly protested, "A birthday cake? If we celebrate the December birthdays, then the others will feel left out. How can we have a birthday cake?"

"Easy. I'll put on twelve candles, one for every month of the year. Then it will be everyone's cake. Besides, my class is reading about a birthday party and I'd like them to see a cake with candles. Then they can appreciate what they are reading about."

When she brought in the cake, the tiny flames dancing as she walked, the youngsters' eyes grew big and bright. They would not have been more surprised and delighted if she had brought out elves and fairies.

We could never keep up with village holidays. Church days were according to the Russian calendar as were also Christmas and Big New Years and Little New Years. We liked to watch our folk parade with their Christmas star. It was a huge, faded-bright, tinsel-covered star, three or four feet across, fastened to a wooden arm so that it could be turned like a wheel. Singers followed Second Chief who carried it from cabin to cabin. In each home they sang Russian carols — an acappella choir worth hearing. Christmas festivities extended into January when they had their Little Christmas. Western in our celebrations, we chose to have ours earlier and the arrangement made room for both the old and the new.

Christmas program means dressing up. Good used clothing had been sent to give to our people and a fair percentage of the folk made an effort to come to our program in Sunday best. Mildred told the Christmas story and we sang the English Christmas carols. Our timid pupils would not speak pieces and we could not have the usual school play. That was all right because we didn't need to drag out all the familiar American customs at once.

Missionary groups in the States had sent gifts for all and we had candy to spare, but I never felt that our Christmas was their Christmas. Too often I had stood out in the cold, shivering in sub-zero weather, listening to these people singing in their church. There is tremendous beauty and harmony to their Russian songs. Because our carols are new to them, they would labor out every word. Next Christmas and a few more Christmases will pass before they thrill to the hymns we know and love.

Crunching their hard candy, our people sat in cliques, talking softly among themselves. By handfuls they left until we were alone, then made cocoa. We found the hot drink relaxing. Later we would begin our packing, preparing to

leave the next morning for McGrath where we would spend our holidays. We owed it to our people, as well as to ourselves, to get away from them for a while.

Cups in hand, we sat listening to the crackling in the old heater. Without warning, the fire awakened with a roar as air leaked in from somewhere. Mildred stood to turn the damper on the pipe and checked the time — eight o'clock. The party had begun at five so there still was an evening ahead of us.

"If no one comes by the time I get this cocoa down," announced Mildred, "I'm going to lock the door, pack, and get some rest."

She did not finish. The door opened. In came several adults with furs to be taken to McGrath and sold for groceries and other furs to be sent to Sears in exchange for orders from them.

Mildred looked at the clock again and knew how many times the hands would go round before we could call it a night. She pressed her lips tightly and groaned her complaint, "Why didn't I keep still?"

The following afternoon we flew to McGrath, feeling like wrecks. Perhaps we looked the part. When we got to McGrath, Pearl insisted we rest when we stayed with her. Ah, the luxury of sleeping late! Marybeth, a teacher from Wasilla, stayed with the Phillips so there were teachers and missionaries all over the place. We were a convention minus any pertinent business other than eating and playing games.

We will never forget that week. When we got up in the mornings, the room was warm, quite unlike Nikolai. There we took turns getting up and lighting the fire or trying to revive a few coals, really ashes. Our schoolhouse home was often so cold that a film of ice spread itself over the water pails and the ink froze solid. The mornings Mildred got up first she would soon have all kinds of popping sounds coming

from the Yukon stove. The mornings I was first we had lots of smoke and late breakfast. I knew all the rules: dry kindling and laying the sticks so as to allow air to circulate between them. The rules don't work for me. Fires and I don't understand each other. Oh, the contentment of one solid week of not having to get up to fight such a battle!

TEN :- New Addition to the Faculty

MALEMUTES aren't exactly house pets, but they are amazingly light on their feet. I found out, firsthand. As we returned from McGrath, two teams met us at the lake. Mildred got into one sled and I into another. The teams were delayed a few minutes and maybe the dogs got bored. We did not notice what started the fray, but they were definitely displeased with each other. In order to get into a stiff fight and settle it, they had to climb over the sleds. The dogs made up their minds in such a hurry that we had no time to make up ours. The next thing we knew dogs were coming at us.

Acting on first impulse, Mildred jumped out of her sled and ran. Fortunately, none of the dogs took after her. I saw her go, but my first impulse was to grab the bulky quilt that was round me, yank it over my head, and give it a tight twist about my body as I threw myself face down on the bottom of the sled. I felt the dogs as they ran over me to meet the oncoming team. A number of them met right on top of me and had their tussle jumping around on my back. As long as they kept fighting each other and kept their tangle to themselves, I knew I would be all right.

The mushers flew into action and separated the teams. When I heard the worst was over, I crawled out for a good laugh with the others. I didn't have so much as a bruise to show for the experience, though I admit that I felt a bit shook. The dogs did not remain angry; they forgave and forgot and pulled us to our village.

Setting our suitcases down in the schoolhouse, we looked

around at the living room end of it. Living room is not the right term — we looked at our corner. It seemed rather drab after living elsewhere but, crowded as our corner was, that corner was home. The building was new and clean. True, we had left Second Chief's chairs in his cabin and were sitting on boxes until we could get some put-it-together-yourself furniture by mail order, but there were comforts far exceeding the previous winter. Among other virtues, this building was considerably warmer and, being our established dwelling, we could make improvements as time went by.

Tukonee, the dog more or less ours, was not with us any more. He was too smart for his own good, even daring to take advantage of my being smaller than Mildred. When we took him out on the trail, he behaved as long as Mildred had hold of his rope. As soon as I took over, he either pulled away or tried to knock me down. Two front feet pitted against my stomach, over I would go. Perhaps it was all in play, but he was part wolf which caused uneasiness about taking chances. Tukonee was a beautiful dog — he ought to have been with all the cooking especially for him. Every musher in the village would have liked to own him. Listening to the natives talk, we learned that Second Chief was more considerate of his team out on the trail than he was of himself. When camping out he bedded his dogs with spruce boughs before he set up his own tent. That convinced us and we gave him Tukonee.

We thought he was a good dog and when his new owner put him in harness we became quite excited. After his first trip with him, Second Chief dropped in and we were quick to ask about Tukonee.

“How did he act?”

Came the matter-of-fact reply, “Just like any other dog.” We really had expected something more.

We thought the same of our pupils. Mildred's were in their third-grade readers by this time and making progress. Mildred never tired of talking about Jim's arithmetic or Dora's spelling. My class was doing "as well as can be expected." No two school days, however, were the same. Lessons suggested activities and activities suggested lessons. We were pleased with our pupils and they knew it. When Philip decided he could talk English without being coaxed and begged, we praised him and meant every flowery word. Didn't our children have any faults? Once I saw a beautiful child who never did anything wrong. Her ruffled dresses were never soiled and she only sat and smiled. She never did anything wrong for the same reason she never did anything right. She never did anything for her mind had stopped growing.

Our children's minds were growing and they did things wrong. They understood my scoldings when crayons, pencils and rulers kept disappearing through knotholes and cracks in the floor. The permanent flooring had not yet been put down. I scolded on general principles. When I was tired, chasing pencils irritated me. When I was not tired, I really did not blame the boys and girls for getting fed up with school. Sledding is more fun than writing.

We had heavier snows the second winter. Rather than have planes land on the lake, the village leaders had decided to pack the snow down by snowshoeing a runway on the river. Progress. Mildred and I borrowed snowshoes and took part in tramping down an airstrip. Men, women, and even children walked back and forth for several hours, packing the snow to make a solid surface. Pilots thanked us for our efforts as they had in the past lost valuable time when compelled to wait for teams to go to the lake to meet them.

We heard a plane coming in for a landing. Mildred watched it from the window while I got ready to meet it.

"There's no need for you to go down there," she said. "It's taking off already. The pilot set a box down and a couple of men are bringing it up the path. We have nothing ordered so I'm sure it is not for us. Wonder whose it is."

Then Miska, grinning from ear to ear, came in. The box he carried had several air holes in the lid and on the sides.

I sneaked a sidelong glance at Mildred; she knew why the holes. Fine time for me to be remorseful over past bargaining. I winced when she blurted out disgustedly, "You asked for it and I'll have no part of it."

When in McGrath over the holidays, I had told Marybeth, the teacher from Wasilla, how difficult we found it to interest children in primary stories when they were unable to associate those stories with their own experiences. I used kitten stories as an illustration. Marybeth was quick to offer her kitty. She didn't want to give up Kusky, but he and her roommate simply could not get along. To keep peace, she would give him away. I accepted him sight unseen. My youngsters would love to have a kitten. Under my breath, so would I. I really did not think she would send him. I cut the twine, carefully lifted the cover, and a homely white creature leaped out and scampered under the desks. The villagers who had gathered to see what the teachers had acquired this time had a hilarious time. Several chased the frightened animal around the desks and under a bench. Me to his rescue. "Come, kitty, kitty. Leave him alone. He's scared. He doesn't know us. Poor kitty. Poo-oor kitty."

So they left him alone and I went after him myself. I got down on all fours and went where he went.

"Come, kitty, kitty, kitty." When I finally got kitty in my arms, I realized he was no darling kitten. He was a half-grown cat.

Something about him (for sure I can't imagine what) must have touched Mildred's heart. I could see already that she was softening as she read aloud part of Marybeth's letter that came with Kusky, "As you remember, I told you he is quite naughty. He is also lovable if you can see it that way. My roommate couldn't. He had a soft coat, tattle-tale gray, until I gave him a bath. Too many applications of bar soap made half of his hair fall out, but at least what remains is a lovely white. Do be good to him."

Mildred paused to turn the biscuits she was baking in a skillet on top of the stove. There was more shuffling of feet as others came in, Granny leading the way.

She threw up her hands. "Eee-yah, kiddy."

"Touch him, Grandma. He's nice."

"Eee-yah," as she laughed way up the scale.

After two or three days the newest addition to the faculty became adjusted well enough to begin acting as Marybeth said he would. His favorite antic was hiding in desks. When children reached for their books, he scratched and bit. Little folks cried and older ones broke into an uproar until either Mildred or I took charge. The homemade desks were moveable and the offender was rudely dumped on the floor along with books, pencils and marbles.

There was a second approved method of handling Kusky when he got into the factory-made desks which could not be easily overturned. While someone played around with a pencil in the inkwell hole to get his attention, one of us reached in and yanked him out. For all his mischievousness though, I never honestly regretted getting him. The rascal added spice to school hours. He "purred like a motor" and the children read with new interest about kittens and cats.

Flying kites and getting a cat helped our children learn to talk. At least Kusky helped nine-year-old Nikita find his tongue. You see, Kusky had a bad habit of climbing people

like trees. One day in class he was entertaining unkind thoughts, swinging his tail slowly back and forth. He spotted me as his next victim. Bent over a desk, I did not see the coming danger. Nikita did.

He yelled across the room, "Cat, don't bite Agnes!"

I jumped just in time and Kusky sailed past. A close call. Good, Nikita, you saved me that time.

Nikita found out he could talk English and from then on he answered when we spoke to him. His talk was contagious and within a few weeks his pal, Little Nick, had found his tongue too.

Good-for-nothing cat, you were good for something.

Being able to talk with our people to feel the pulse of response, meant much. We learned to appreciate their outright humanness, their wit that does not ride the surface for the benefit of strangers. One day when Kusky was parading along the window sill, stepping choosy and smug, Mrs. Skogomy watched him and then chuckled, "Look like high tone." Where she learned that expression we do not know, but her descriptive words stuck and our cat has been Hi-tone ever since.

Mrs. Skogomy's subtle humor was also in her son, Nick. He strode in one afternoon and seated himself on a school desk.

"Look like more different since you come," he said.

"Yes, Nick," I replied. "Lot different. Now a school and a post office. One new cabin, next year two more maybe. Not like same village. Lot different."

Nick looked as if to ask how dumb could I be. Quietly he explained, "Look like more different since you come. Boys never work before."

He gave a cute grin and went out the door. He wasn't suffering.

Yes, the village was fast changing. Its infant days would be treasured, but never would we want them recalled.

Growth brings problems. The loveliest gardens demand constant care; even the simple task of weeding requires patience and love. To recklessly pull weeds may mean to unmercifully uproot tender plants that grow so close that human hands cannot separate them. Knowing when to keep hands off, however, is not always easy. Sometimes you get tired of it. When John and Eleanor Phillips, missionaries in McGrath, mentioned coming to Nikolai for a few days, we hastened to strengthen the invitation. We had carried the spiritual burden alone and we needed reinforcements. They had more than a professional interest in souls, and we had confidence that our people would recognize that.

Every cabin was open to these missionaries and they spent many pleasant hours visiting the older people while we were busy in school. The Phillips were a blessing to us for in our much doing we had need to be calmed down and reminded of the Lord, His faithfulness even when we fail. We worried about our village and worry is not faith. Like children we would reach into the soft earth for the seed we had planted and would force its growth. We would touch the blade of green. We needed to be reminded that to do that would be to crush tender life. Only God can give life and growth.

Friday night we had Story. John was closing his message. "Pilate ask people, 'What will you do with Jesus?' Tonight same question. Jesus still lives. What will you do with Him? Will you take Jesus into your life?"

A low murmur went through the back row. Miska from Big River stood to his feet. A born leader meant that all eyes would and did focus on him. He spoke briefly in his language and nearly two-thirds of the people stood. Some stood with determination, some with hesitancy, and others as if they had been prompted by rule of majority. We do not know what their leader said, and we cannot tell what our people were thinking. Whatever the motives that lay

underneath, over the room lay the hush of Divine Presence. No one could have been in that meeting and sincerely doubted that the lowly Nazarene still calls men and women from all walks of life to a walk with Him.

Where are they tonight? We do not know. We only know that God called and that He is faithful.

ELEVEN :- Fruit of Labor

MILDRED AND I were up early that morning. Dressing for the trip to The Landing was almost half the battle. A few times I tried leaving my several pairs of socks inside each other when I took them off. I figured that way I could put them all on at once in the morning. It can be done, but half the day you squirm and twist because of unwanted wrinkles and a heel turning slightly to one side. Sooner or later you have to take time out to peel and dress all over again. You might as well do it right from the start.

We noted the mercury was right on zero. Though not mushers, we had listened to the natives talk and knew the day would be ideal for travel. If the snow is too soft, sleds sink deep into the ruts and that makes for hard pulling. To the other extreme, snow with a hard crust is cruel to the dogs' feet. Under such conditions it may even be necessary for the mushers to put "shoes" on the dogs. The idea of shoes on a dog was fascinating and we thought we were going to see things that looked like baby booties. They were just scraps of cloth tied on the dogs' feet with twine.

By seven o'clock our teams had whisked out of sight of the village, through the wood yard, and toward The Landing. Slim took Mildred in his sled. They were in the lead with nine dogs while old Andrew followed close behind with me in his sled.

Bertha was surprised when the howling of her dogs announced the arrival of two teams at the early hour of nine o'clock. She was more amazed when she saw us. Immediately,

she wanted to know whatever had happened. Nothing. We took the trip for fun so that Mildred might have the experience of going over the trail.

Arriving home in the afternoon, we noticed smoke coming out of our chimney. Someone had filled the stove for us. We thought perhaps thoughtful Mrs. Skogomy was warming the building. Opening our door we walked in on Esther Schaubel, the nurse, seated at a desk near the heater. She was quite relaxed with a book in hand, her feet propped up on another desk.

"What brought you here?" we asked.

"A plane. I said I'd be back even if I didn't know when, so I arrive on a day when you have taken off. I've been right at home. The folk told me you'd be back by evening. In fact," she added, "I've given a few shots already."

Esther could fit in anywhere. The trait is appreciated for when hard up for space and no modern conveniences, you cannot be fussy over guests. "Here's the wash pan, the dipper is over there, and if you need a wash cloth, there are some in that box." Mildred and I thought we were as clean as other people, but in Nikolai we both knew how to wash our hands and then splash the rest of the water over our faces. Our guest would have to do likewise.

Little Deaphan's mother, Anna, came in. Recognizing her, Esther asked about the children of the family, carefully avoiding mention of the youngest. When Anna went out, the nurse turned to us to ask about the oatmeal baby, "He didn't live, did he? That's why I never asked about him. I wouldn't want to hurt her."

"But he did live. The baby is doing fine, drinks his milk now, and sleeps through the night. We're so happy for him."

She shook her head. "I never thought he would pull through. I want to see that child."

We sent word for Anna to bring the baby. Her restful

smile was a mixture of joy and pride as the nurse talked to her. The little fellow followed their movements with expressive eyes. He would need a few more months to regain what he had lost physically, but he was mentally alert and the joy of the family. Someone asks if missions pay, if education pays. Here is a counter question, "What are your values?"

Esther stayed a week. That meant ample time for clinics, health instruction in school, and classes for the women during the afternoons. Our ladies attended the classes willingly. Though habits of years cannot be shaken overnight and a revolution of cleanliness was not to be expected, we saw that the hours of instruction bore weight.

The nurse taught us as well as our people. We learned that the ever-present sore eyes in the villages are due primarily to malnutrition and unkempt hair. We recalled the incident during our first year when a child was brought to see what we could do for her badly infected eye. Carefully cleansing with a solution of boric acid we worked until we were able to remove a hair all of ten inches long that had lain curled on the eyeball. Upon removal of the foreign object, the eye began to improve and within a few days the child's vision was restored to nearly normal.

Esther stressed proper eating which has since become almost an obsession with us. Not only should some of our vitamin-laden foods be introduced to the Alaskans, but they should be encouraged to retain much of their former diet. Wild roses grow in abundance and the rose hips, or seed pods, are extremely high in vitamin content. Three rose hips contain vitamin C equivalent to that of one orange.

The Indians are gradually using fewer parts of the fish which is also a serious mistake. In past generations, when they ate the head and part of the "insides," they were better off than after they learned to clean and prepare fish as we do.

They used to eat the liver which we do not, but we pay a high price for someone to put it in capsule form. The natives cannot afford their fish oils that way. Just between us fried fish liver is quite tasty.

The nurse was careful to administer first aid and to give medicine only when absolutely necessary. There were remedies that were fake but these people also had home remedies worth knowing. Those the nurse encouraged. Her policy was never to deliver babies unless an emergency demanded her assistance. With a limited number of doctors and hospitals, and those hundreds of miles apart, you don't go around advising people to consult their family physician. The nurses teach and advise; to help the native is not the final answer to all their problems. They must be helped to help themselves.

It was fun having the nurse for hers was a riotous sense of humor. It invariably broke loose when the strain of the day was past. From her wide travels and experiences she gleaned stories of other villages, villages as primitive as ours. To balance the picture, she encouraged us with short biographies of natives who made good, of some who are now teachers among their own people.

She liked our people and they liked her. Perhaps one of the finest compliments we heard paid was to Esther just before she left. After Miska Nikolai's wife had attended several classes, Miska came in with their solemn pledge of confidence, "My wife, he believe him."

Helpers could come and go; we stayed on to play both role of hero and of villain. Most of the time we were pretty well liked. Then there were other times. Once we ran out of wood, and no one would volunteer to haul a supply. We reached the end, finding ourselves with no choice but to dismiss the children from school with instructions for all the

older ones to go home for saws and axes. The afternoon session would be held in the wood yard across the river.

Salmonia came to us after the other pupils had left the room, "I bring my team. You ride with me to wood yard."

Salmonia was one of our teen-agers from Big River. She spoke softly and kindly. I looked at her clear brown eyes. Usually I looked at her hands, large and strong. Her mother had died when she was small and Salmonia knew quite a bit about how it feels to be unwanted. That day I noticed her eyes. She whom we had pitied was pitying us. We were on the outside. She also knew about that and she would compensate if she could.

After lunch our young musher came. The team was fresh, and we flew over the trail. I was in the front of the sled and as we were going down a side path I saw a six-foot drop ahead. I yelled to Salmonia, but not in time. Mildred replied, "Oh, who's afraid . . ."

She never finished her remark because, muffled in a pile of snow, sled, girls, saw, and axes all landed in a heap. Dear Salmonia hurried to right the sled and pull us out of the drifts, but we came up laughing. Mildred had torn her slacks and I all but cracked my head. Hurt, but not injured, we went our merry way to the wood yard.

Everyone worked hard until interrupted by the hum of a plane. We stopped, and stood like monuments among the trees listening carefully to know whether it had landed on the river in front of the village. It had. We dropped our tools and fairly flew the mile back to the village. A fish and wildlife plane had come to check the limits of beaver.

"So this is the way you teach school." One of the game wardens kidded us.

"Well, we have to teach practical subjects, you know," we quipped back.

One of the men turned to the lad looking on. "What's your name?"

"Willie."

"How old are you?"

"Eleven. I go to school. I am in second grade," he answered.

The visitor asked a couple more questions, then turned to us in honest surprise. "Hey," he said, "your kids talk."

"Of course they do," we answered as casually as we could. Actually we were quite taken back by the whole conversation. We didn't know our Willie would be willing to talk to a stranger.

Once more that month we had to close school and go for wood. They'll do it every time. The fish and wildlife plane came again.

The role of villain is no fun. The climax came one morning during school opening exercises. After asking the children to repeat the Lord's Prayer, we heard ourselves as a duet. Asking for the why of such behavior, we got nothing but sullen expressions. The rest of the day was terrible. Our pupils were downright contrary, taxing our patience to the limit. I said I loved Nikolai, but that week I didn't know.

I did love Nikolai, for those you love the most can hurt you the most.

Tension became almost unbearable. Alone in our building, Mildred and I tried to analyze our new problem. Was something really wrong or had we allowed this to grow out of proportion in our own minds? Perhaps we should turn the school over to someone else. But who? We arrived at no conclusions.

Calling a village meeting, we watched the adults straggle in at the hour appointed. Everyone acted uneasy and, if the truth were known, we weren't exactly poised either. We asked why the children would not mind us, why the parents

seemed angry, but instead of answering they avoided our gaze and talked among themselves for several minutes.

Finally Miska Deaphan nervously took the place of spokesman for his people and confessed, "We tell children not to pray because you close your eyes."

Mildred and I just looked at each other.

"You mean you don't want them to close their eyes?" I asked.

"Yes."

Not certain we were understanding each other, I reworded my question, "You want them keep eyes open?"

"Yes."

"Why you people never tell us? Hard work when children don't like what we do. We want them to learn Lord's Prayer. It's all right if they keep eyes open. We close our eyes when we pray so we won't look around. We look around, we think about other things, so we close our eyes. If you want them to keep eyes open, that is all right."

"That main thing. Keep eyes open."

"Keep eyes open. That is all right. But not main thing. Main thing is know what you say and pray from your heart. What if you fall in big deep hole? You don't stand nice and pray with eyes open. You be glad to pray standing on your head, eyes shut. God can hear you even that way."

I paused and the people chuckled. They got the point.

"We tell children they can keep eyes open. We don't want to make you mad."

With the homely illustration bordering on the humorous, the tension broke and a low murmur of approval went through the room. After reassuring them that it was a minor issue, good feelings were restored. We ventured on a question.

"Will you build room for teachers next year?"

That threw the natives into sharp controversy. Political parties are not a Yankee invention. We leaned against the chalkboard and let the people go to it. From hearing their language all the time, we could grasp fragments of it and had a fair idea of what was going on. Chief led the group who did not want to build. He thought his people had done enough and everything henceforth and forevermore should be done by the government or by the teachers. Three of the leading village men, however, were of different thinking. Dictator in his own rights, this was one time he had to back down.

Miska Deaphan finally gave the verdict. "We build teacher's cabin if you come back one more year."

"All right, we come back one more year."

Chief, who always chose a place within shot of the stove, had been sitting on the woodpile, his feet propped on the edge of the water barrel. He swung his feet to the floor and shuffled toward the door, his thin, bony face set and expressionless. The others followed. They were a grim lot. Only Mr. Deaphan, his admiring wife close behind him, turned with a cheery word, "Guess everybody happy now."

Though we weren't too sure of that, we managed a smile.

As the last person went out, I picked up the teakettle. "How about something hot to drink?" I asked. "Things were really tight tonight. I didn't know whether my hide was worth anything or not."

I pushed my hair back, rubbing cool fingertips against my scalp. My headache would wear off in a day or two. Mildred almost invariably became ill from such turmoil. Running a high temperature, she caused me to tiptoe about the room. We would return another year. If it was all we could do to handle the misunderstandings caused by misunderstanding, a newcomer would find the job that much more difficult.

From then till the close of that school year, our pupils

were very sweet. They treated us with respect beyond anything we were used to receiving. They quoted the Lord's Prayer lustily, probably with eyes open. There were more "big days," supposedly holidays, when the youngsters were kept out of school. We wanted to object, but enough battles had been won for that winter. To win more might do more harm than good.

Those "big days" too often meant liquor. Hearing a commotion outdoors and seeing a team coming without its owner was nothing uncommon. Knowing it was certain death for a sleeping or injured man to be out alone all night, other teams were immediately harnessed and men sent to search for a drunken musher who had fallen by the side of the trail. We could do absolutely nothing about the sale of liquor. It's harmful, but it's legal.

One morning as we were about to ring the school bell, several folks came to tell us that one of the men had come home from The Landing the night before with a small box of food and a bottle of whiskey. We knew he should have had nearly a month's supply of groceries which he needed for his family of seven children. A lot of what went on in the village was none of our business. This was. When children suffer, their needs become our business. The authenticity of the story must be checked first.

Knocking, but not waiting for an answer, I entered a neighboring cabin. The man in question was asleep.

"Where is food he buy?" I asked his wife.

She pointed to a few items on the table.

"He bring back money?"

"No."

"Is it true you have to ask someone for food this morning?"

"Yes."

With that I left. After school I returned to the shack they called home. Its furnishings were incomplete, a rickety table

and a heater, an old sewing machine and a bench. They had no beds, no blankets, only a few pieces of quilts and a pile of rags. The head of the house was awake; and with all the pent-up feelings of the day and disgust with the whole liquor business, I began.

"Shame. Your family hungry. Children have no stockings. Baby he cry. You go away to buy food and come back with nothing. Only drink. That is not right. Who is going to take care of your family? That is your job. Little girl stay out of school to get wood while you sleep. Aren't you ashamed? Nice wife, nice children, and you don't take care of them."

That wasn't the half of what I said, then I remembered. Remembering, I softened. "We know you can't help it. You love your family. You want to take care of them. Someone give you can of beer, then another can, then something stronger. You can't help yourself. You drink more. Just like you tied with chain. Devil has you tied.

"Listen, next time someone want to give you whiskey, you say no. If you feel like yes, pray quick. Ask Jesus to help you say 'no.' Bible say Jesus come to set us free. You can be free if you ask Jesus.

"We are sorry this happened. We pray for you. Jesus is the One who can help. Talk to Him just like friend and He will hear you. He will break the chain. Then you take good care of your family."

The man was silent except for an "Uh-huh" at intervals. He never fought back in either words or attitude and I honestly felt he took in what I said. I do not know what went through his mind, but I do know that never again during our stay in the village did he come home intoxicated. The family that had been the poorest and at the very bottom of the village social ladder made a slow but steady climb to a higher level of living. The children were better fed and

cared for and the day the family moved into the new cabin he built for them was a great day for all of us.

Apart from village problems, Mildred had cares at home. She was very devoted to her family and when every letter from home reminded her that her father's health was failing, she became duly concerned. Knowing he did not have many months to live, she talked constantly about wanting to see him once more. We thought about closing school early so she could go to the States, but we were hesitant because of our people. We had said so much about the importance of education and regular school attendance that leaving early could make us appear inconsistent.

Mildred's hopes of finding a way were realized the last of April. The chief from Telida came to visit our village. He was a talker. If he got an idea, he pressed it until he got his way and his persuasive manner won him quite a following.

He was in our village when a letter came from the hospital saying that little Martha was not expected to live. He thought Mrs. Skogomy should go to see her daughter. The village was not sure about that, but he brought argument into play. He talked and waved his arms around. Pretty soon the village was agreeing that Mrs. Skogomy should go to Seward.

She was overjoyed with the thought of seeing her daughter. She thrilled in planning the trip, except the airplane ride. When she talked about it, she giggled and small beads of perspiration stood out on her forehead. We and the others who had been in planes kept assuring her that she needn't be afraid, that she would like it. Convinced, she prepared to go.

We sent Hi-Tone, the cat, to the Phillips' and wound up our school in such a hurry that none of us could quite believe we were leaving. When the plane came for us we left without fanfare which was well. In Anchorage Mildred

stayed with friends while I went to Seward with Mrs. Skogomy.

Martha had a new splurge of strength when we got there. I visited her for only a few minutes, going out to leave mother and daughter together. The social worker suggested I see the hospital and I promptly fell in love with the nursery. It was decorated as if for a party, but really it was the little patients who won my heart. The pretty nurse in her crisp uniform took me from crib to crib and introduced me to each of her young charges. After explaining her assigned duties she sermonized on that which was above duty. Though she did not have the time to give the children all the love and affection they needed, she spread out as much as she could. She delighted in visitors who would talk to the boys and girls for she felt it important that they be helped to overcome their timidity and become socially adjusted against the day when they would be released from the sanitarium. Tucked away behind high walls, the nurse was doing a tremendous job and her influence will reach far into the corners of Alaska.

I dreaded going back to Martha's room when it came time for her mother and me to go back to the airport. To tear them apart seemed cruel, and I expected an unhappy scene. I need not have feared. Mrs. Skogomy was an intelligent woman, a woman of sound judgment and the hard years had taught her much. She, in turn, had taught her children well, so we draw the curtain for the moments that belong to them.

My heart was in Alaska. I wanted to go back to the McGrath area with Mrs. Skogomy, but Mildred would not go alone to the States. This would be her last opportunity to see her father and for me to have argued the point would have been heartless. I gave in and went South, yet I felt impatient. There was so much to be done up North that I

counted the weeks at home. We wrote Martha often, hoping against hope for her recovery. We prayed, but not a stubborn prayer, for we know that God knows best.

This is given for what it is worth. I make no claims, but I can never forget it. At home I had a strange dream that I was afraid to tell, afraid it had a meaning, and afraid I might lose the hush that went with it. I dreamed that Mildred and I were in a deep woods. We were working there. A tree fell and I heard a voice quote Ecclesiastes 11:3 ". . . if the tree fall toward the south, or toward the north, in the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be."

A few days later I stood in the post office with a letter in my hand. I did not want to open it. I needed no one to tell me its contents, for I knew. It seemed as if I had been forewarned. Slowly, numbly, I ripped the upper edge of the envelope, took out the neat typewritten sheet, and read.

I folded the letter and went on about my work. We had started packing for the trip back to Alaska. There were those who needed our help, but not Martha. Martha with her big brown eyes and delicate features we would never see again. Martha had gone to sleep for the last time.

TWELVE :- Rallying to the Cause

VIEWING OUR BUILDING in the fall of the year, we were at a loss to know where to begin cleaning. The ceiling poles put up when they were green were now dusty dry which left huge cracks between. The summer breezes had persuaded moss, sand and dirt to seep through until the floor, desks, books, and stove were literally covered. Mildred lifted the door of the Yukon heater which grated beseechingly.

"Hurts my fillings," I complained as I put my hand over my mouth. No sympathy from bystanders. What were fillings to them? Mildred, Dutch housekeeper at heart, was eager to get at the sweeping. She turned the water pails right side up and handed them to Eman who was unfortunate enough to be the one closest.

"Get us water, please. We'd like to have a bite to eat before we start in on all of this."

At that statement it occurred to the group standing around that perhaps we were tired from our six-hour trip by water from The Landing. A mother spoke firmly to her children and several scurried outdoors.

Kathy spoke. "I chop wood." Picking up the hatchet and a dry stick from the corner, she made a pile of kindling and we soon had a crackling fire. There, that was better. Taking off our jackets, chilled by the dampness of early evening, we absorbed the heat like thirsty blotters and the physical warmth reacted on our spirits. We noticed that Deaphan, our oatmeal baby, had grown quite a bit during the summer months.

"He feel good now?"

"Yes."

"He looks good. All the children grow like grass in summertime."

The mothers smiled away their reserve, and we knew we were glad to be back in Nikolai in spite of the sand in our eyes from giving the door a healthy slam when we entered.

Opening one of my suitcases, I pulled out a small cardboard carton and lifted out two little green turtles. Affectionately yours, Jake and Sleepy Joe. Our last day in Portland a girl friend and I had tramped from one store to another in search of them. We found them in a feed store and chose these two out of what appeared to be hundreds wriggling and climbing over one another in a huge glass bowl. The clerk had assured me that they could be put in my suitcase with never a worry as they required little air. Their lungs can't be very big. At each stop on our trip North I had taken them out for a breather; once at my uncle's home to swim in a baking dish, once to bathe in a hotel room washbowl, and later in various Alaskan kitchens. Both the turtles and the startled housewives survived. The natives were more intrigued with the turtles than if I had pulled a rabbit out of a hat. They had seen rabbits before.

Our villagers said they had been lonely. They missed school and all the goings-on around our building. Right away they wanted Story, but we asked a day to get the room in order. When we were ready to buckle down to our winter schedule, we rang our bell. Story at last. The majority of the village were present, singing lustily and listening intently as we brought the Bible lesson. This year started out differently than previous years. The people understood us fairly well and sang our English songs without their usual hesitancy.

In time we noticed another definite change. Those who were really interested in spiritual things became closer, told us of radio Gospel programs they listened to, and in small ways hardly discernible to an outsider, they expressed their hunger for a better way of life. By the same token, others who had previously made it a point to be at Story in spite of wind and snow now saw to it that moosehide had to be tanned at Story time, or they would have supper late and use the time conflict for an excuse to be absent. We said nothing; they were free to make their own choices. We were in position to bluff, but we never resorted to that. Religious matters must never be a point of pressure. Only as school teachers did we wield the law.

Mildred and I agreed to trade classes for our third year. The older ones would come to me. This proved to be a satisfactory arrangement giving both of us new experience with different age groups. We compared them with state-side youngsters and realized they had a long way to go. We also realized they had made great strides considering their background and language handicaps.

The teen-agers were beginning to express delight when reading stories from their books and geography fascinated them. They were, nevertheless, teen-agers. All the girls were ready to do anything for Eman who was just shy enough to be a challenge. I don't know whether he knew it or not, but he really had it made in his own circle.

They pulled teen-age tricks too. Telida chief was chief tooth-puller when he came to the village as he had a pair of forceps and was glad to relieve anyone of an aching tooth. After a couple of extractions which a number gathered to witness, he became forceps-happy. We never found out who was responsible for daring them, but someone dared bystanders to get a tooth pulled just for the lark of it.

The next day I looked at one of the prettiest girls and howled, "Agnesa, how could you? and right in front!"

She covered her mouth with her hand and giggled. We heard more snickers around the room and discovered a couple of the boys had done the same thing.

With about twenty children in school, we were being crowded farther and farther into the corner. There would have to be pressure for the promised teacherage. When brought up at a village meeting the response was an icy mantle over the gathering. Mildred talked quietly and calmly, reminding of their promise and pointing out how their children would benefit from what was done for their school.

Silence was heavy until Slim spoke up, "I help you."

Would anyone volunteer to give him a hand? No answer.

"Well, Slim, that's nice of you. Maybe someone will change his mind and help too. This is government school now. We must keep our promise to them and do our part. Maybe someone else will help."

The latter statement was as much reassurance for ourselves as for Slim. We learned to grind out a lot of reassurances for ourselves that fall. Certainly we could not get far on the new room without the whole village back of us. We pleaded some more. We had chosen the song and they weren't about to help us sing it. Pouting and angry they slunk out of the room that night, leaving us staring after them and wondering what the evening had spelled. We had but one course to follow and that was to go ahead with plans just as if we had the full cooperation of all our people, trusting that in time they would fall into line.

Mildred took charge of the entire school the next day, leaving me free to go to The Landing with Slim to get the supply of gas for the school lights as well as lumber and nails for the teacherage-to-be. I chose Kathryn from Big

River to accompany me as she was the one who could best be depended upon to talk if I need information or advice. To my delight I found Kathryn even more sociable than I had expected her to be.

Arriving at the traders by nine o'clock, we were disappointed to learn that Clint was away and would not be back until late afternoon. Bertha did not want the responsibility of measuring lumber, so we had to kill time waiting for his return. We looked at magazines in the house and wandered outdoors viewing the bleak landscape that was getting ready for winter. The first snow could not be many days away. Killing more time, we wandered to the store to warm ourselves by the big heater. After some minutes, Kathryn left me and went to the other end of the store to talk with Bertha. At first I paid no attention. Then a sentence floated my way and aroused me. It was something I did not like.

Bertha was talking. "Kathryn, why don't you marry him? You're both in your twenties now. I heard the people talking about it. They want you to marry. Don't you want to?"

"I don't know."

At that moment Slim walked in to say that Clint was coming. The lumber would be measured and then we would be on our way. While the men loaded the lumber into the boat, Kathryn and I sauntered down the winding dirt road flanked on either side by willows. We stood on the bank of the swollen river, hugging ourselves to keep warm. Hesitantly I cleared my throat, wanting to say something but not knowing quite how to begin.

"Kathryn, do you want to marry that fellow you were talking about?"

"I don't know."

I wondered whether to pursue the subject. I did not want to meddle, but I had reason to think that Kathryn wasn't

any more in love than I was. And I wasn't. I also thought I knew what she wanted to do, though it seemed the impossible for more than one reason.

"Do you want to go away to work?"

Kathryn caught her breath quickly and with expression exceptional for her people, she answered brightly, "Yes!"

"That's what I thought. It would be nice for you to have your own home, but I hate to see you marry someone who drinks all the time. Then you fight all the time. It's no good to see sled come home alone and you know drunk man is lying by the trail somewhere. No, Kathryn, that is not the kind of life for you. Besides, if you give your heart to the Lord and be a Christian and you are with someone who does not want to be one, then you can't do things together. He would not be happy with you either."

"I like to go away and get job."

"I like to see you go away too. Right now village won't let you go. But something will work out for you. We will pray."

"Yes."

I looked across the water. There wasn't much else to say. I knew the village law was like the law of the Medes and Persians. I also knew Kathryn had no business getting married. A year ago I would have been happy to see her go away to work. Now I wasn't sure. We had reason to believe she had T.B. Stacked on top of all that was the simple fact that she was a second choice. If she were hospitalized, perhaps the village elders would consent to his having his first choice, one who really cared about him. Being first in his life, the other girl could do more for him than Kathryn ever could. After all, he had his right to happiness, too. But who was I to remind her that she was second choice?

The hands on my watch pointed to an afternoon hour; our location on the globe made it night. Kathryn and I

agreed we could brave the cold wind no longer and ran down the embankment to the boat. The oil in our knee joints was too cold for us to put on the brakes.

We dived under heavy quilts that served as break against the knifing wind. Slim started the motor and we were on our way.

Six hours. We watched the stars come out one by one. They looked cold. Kathryn and I huddled close for warmth. The willows faded with the night and the water became black, the shoreline blacker. We were grateful Slim was well acquainted with the river currents, for little else than memory guided him. The three of us stared silently into the night, each living some phase of his own life. I looked up at the stars and breathed a prayer of thanksgiving. Today I had talked as girl to girl with one of my adopted people. Race and education were forgotten; we were on common ground.

Romance, or its counterparts, can be a problem. I thought of others in the village who would marry, but could not get parental consent. I thought of those who would be forced into marriage because they had been promised in infancy. Then I thought of that one who was dealt the greatest injustice of all. No matter what she does that is wrong, I instinctively want to fight for her, but I came too late for my fight to do any good. A bright-eyed, clean and attractive teen-ager was given to a man in his sixties who had never grown past his first ten years mentally. I am glad I went to Nikolai, but sometimes I have wished someone else had gone there years before.

We were glad to have some building material on hand because two days later Dr. James Ryan from the Juneau offices came to Nikolai to see the school they had consented to take. His stay was brief, his questions straight to the point.

"Will the people build a teacherage?"

"Yes, they will," came our direct reply.

"There hasn't been much progress made considering the lake is iced over and not many weeks left in which to work. Are you sure the room will be completed for use this year?"

"Of course it will. Our people won't let us down."

We meant it. True, two days before they had given us a cold shoulder, yet we had confidence in them. They would surprise us by suddenly rallying as they had the year before. Daily we looked for snow flurries, and we knew the first round of logs had to be down before the ground was frozen. We weren't worried. Somehow we just knew it would all work out.

Our visitor took a few minutes to look around the village. His few comments were of special interest. He had a better long-range picture of the interior villages than we had. Dr. Ryan reminded us that other missionaries and teachers had experienced the same struggles we had been through and we were not expected to perform overnight wonders in our teaching.

We remembered his words in parting, "Don't become discouraged. Remember, you will never accomplish what you want in just a few years. It will take two or three generations."

After he left, I turned to Mildred. "He said for us never to become discouraged, like perhaps we were. Are you discouraged?"

"No. Are you?"

"No."

Our people did rally to the cause. Within a few days several men went upriver a short distance to a wooded area and began cutting trees. They knew well how to handle saw and axe and before two sundowns they had enough logs to build the teacherage. They floated the logs down on a

raft and tied them just below the school. We were busy teaching and unaware of what they were doing until one of the men came to the schoolroom door asking for the help of the older students to get the logs up the bank alongside our building. The proposed teacherage was to be a lean-to against the school. While he was explaining their plan, another went to different homes to solicit the aid of the women. I left my four younger pupils with Mildred while the teen-agers accompanied me to the river bar.

Though the method for hauling the logs up the fifty-foot slope and across an equal distance of level ground to the spot designated was a most crude and cruel method, I could suggest none better. The men pulled the green logs out of the water while fifteen of us, mostly women and girls, grabbed a stout rope with firm hold and dragged the limbless trees up to where they could be laid out for peeling.

We were a human dog team. As each log was a good twenty feet in length, it was heavy pulling. After four or five trips my throat was burning and my lungs felt as if they were on fire. My temples throbbed and I wanted a moment to rest.

"Let's get a drink of water."

A number of us dashed to the schoolroom where we drank from a common dipper; no time to think about germs. We did have time to notice that one of our girls, as lovely a fourteen-year-old as could be, looked nearly exhausted. Her breath was too short.

"Agnes, this too hard for you," I said.

"No."

"Yes. You go back to your seat. Read a book."

"No."

She was determined, but this time I stuck to my decision. "Yes, you go back to school. Listen, Agnes, we won't think you are lazy. You are sick. You go back."

With her eyes Agnes expressed her gratitude for being released. She quietly took her seat in the classroom. I looked at her, her long straight black hair falling over her thin shoulders. She looked back at me and smiled, a sweet smile and tired. Her slight frame shook as she coughed.

Running down the steep grade to the river, Mrs. Deaphan panted, "She spit blood that one, I think."

"Agnes?"

"Yes."

"Good you tell me. Too bad she work. I'll watch her."

Within a couple of hours we had pulled up the twenty-five logs. The last three or four were completely beyond my endurance. From the way the others stumbled and slipped in the muddy ruts worn deep with the weight of the logs, I knew they were as tired as I. Between each log we hauled up I had hinted for a rest, just a breather, but no. They were out to get the job done, and it was done. My hands were sore in spite of canvas work gloves. Every muscle ached with the strain and it seemed that the burning in my chest would never cease. Underneath my heart felt big, the strong bigness that comes with being completely happy with one's own children. After the twenty-fifth log, the last log, came rest.

With high hopes Slim, Kathryn, and I made another trip to The Landing the following morning to get more lumber and windows. Two other boats went at the same time for supplies. We were a happy lot warming up by the fire in the trader's home. The buying got under way and the plan was an early start back to Nikolai.

At the store we watched as someone handed out beers. That dampened our hopes for an early return trip. As Kathryn and I saw the men eagerly accepting the cans, we felt uneasy. That's all it takes to get a powwow started. The village had already seen two drinking parties that fall. They

weren't happy affairs, but rather grim warnings of what might take place when nights grew long and tempers taut.

"You don't have to be here. Why don't you go over to the house for a while?" someone asked.

"No. I'll stay."

I stayed. Far be it from me to walk off when my presence might discourage more drinking. I hated that stuff, hated it for what it cost our native people, for what it costs all people.

One by one the men placed the empty cans on the counter.

"Want more?"

"No."

How we did thank the Lord!

After loading the one boat Slim came to tell me that he was unable to take all the needed material; one of the other boats was returning with only a few groceries. It could easily take the extra lumber. I would have to ask the boat owner about it.

I skipped over the path to where he was seated on a log. I quickly explained our problem and asked that he take the overflow load, never giving it a thought that he might refuse. The old fellow could talk some English, but instead of even trying to answer me, he gave the message to someone else to relay.

The third person not wanting to get involved, finally said with embarrassment, "He say no."

"But this is about the last trip we can make down here with the boats. Freeze-up will be anyday now. Even tomorrow might be too late."

Again the boatman spoke through his interpreter, "Want money for gas, want pay."

"But we haven't got it. We have put everything into the school. You should be glad to help. You have children in school. Since we come here we get government help for you

because you can't work. Your family gets more help than anyone. It cost you nothing to help us now. Please help us."

He never answered me. Helping others is a joy, but of this kind of people there are a few in every race. I waited a minute, then turned away slowly and went to the house.

"No, Slim. He won't do it. He wants pay. I don't know what to do."

I swallowed hard, but the lump wouldn't go down. Slamming the door fiercely, I went outside again. There I scolded myself for all I was worth. I had to, or I'd be crying. I faced the wind and it cooled me. Going back into the house, I took my place by the stove.

"What we do now?" asked Kathryn.

"I don't know."

Minutes passed as the men put the finishing touches to their loads. We were all ready to go but for the few lengths of lumber we could not take. Bertha came in, pleased to inform me that the old fellow had consented to taking what we had asked. I'll never know how she talked him into it, but I was grateful. Neither did I take time for questions or to give the Devil time to change anyone's mind. We went quickly to the boat and started for home.

The light from the long row of windows in the school cast a cheery ray across the dark water. Kathryn and I, huddled in the fore of the boat, had not spoken a word for several miles. There hadn't been anything to say since we first left The Landing. It was then that I ruefully declared that perhaps we should never have returned for our third year. I was talking to myself more than to Kathryn, but the remark was one I had no right to make. We are being unfair when we judge all by a grasping few. Kathryn had not replied at first, but with carefully enunciated words she later said, "I don't want you and Mildred to go away."

With that I realized that I had not done so valiantly.

Kathryn had difficulties without sharing her teacher's. We were tired and our reasoning was inconsistent. At times we blamed ourselves for doing too much. Three hours later we lamented not having done enough.

I heard her words, "I don't want you and Mildred to go away."

"I'm sorry I said that, Kathryn. We won't go away. Not before school is out."

The light beckoned. Nikolai was home for all its ups and downs. As we numbly climbed out of the boat, I invited my traveling companions to come with me. "Come. Mildred will have something for us. Don't go to your cabins cold and hungry, maybe everyone asleep. Come with me. We'll feel better with something warm."

Mildred had hot buns when we got home. Nikolai was home and it is amazing how you can quickly forgive home folks and be ready to defend them. Our schoolroom was cozily warm. Shadows cast from the base of the gas lantern lay against the wall. I didn't feel like blaming anybody for anything. But I did think.

So this is what Dr. Ryan meant when he said, "Don't become discouraged. Remember, you will never accomplish what you want to in a few years. It will take two or three generations." Heaven itself must have prompted the Commissioner of Education to give us that strong counsel. We did not want weeds. We wanted something deep-rooted and lasting. That takes time.

Those words helped us through tremendous days ahead.

With a new surge of patriotism, the natives had the teacherage ready for occupancy within a month. It was cute. The logs were new and clean. New house means new furniture so I made a washstand while Mildred brightened the room with gay curtains. We placed our table by a window

and there, leaning on our elbows, we could watch the folk pass by single file over the narrow paths.

We liked the new addition to our school building, and were happily aware that those who objected to its being built in the first place were pleased with it too. Our main room was now strictly for school and community use with an added chalkboard, a beat-up globe of a beat-up world, and a large health chart. Art work was displayed profusely. At last we had a real school.

Other than packing moss for the chinking, there had not been a great deal Mildred and I could do to help erect our humble nine-by-fourteen teacherage. We subsequently began another project and it had been a delicate subject the year before that took both of us to explain.

"There was a little house by the old school. Used to be there when mail teams went through. Now we need new one. That one too far away."

We received a look in reply, a look that asked how particular can you get? Nevertheless, the adults had passed orders on to some of the lads to put up the small house on the windy hill above the school. It was a flimsy excuse for a building, and after its completion we had to line it with cardboard and patch it with scraps of boards we scrounged from old dog houses in an effort to bring it up to our standards of privacy.

This year we would have a new one nearer the school. It would be clean and large enough to store the appliance gas which heretofore had been under a neighboring cache. Never can we forget struggling to fill lanterns outdoors in blinding blizzards, our fingers so numb we couldn't hold the funnel. We could not fill lanterns indoors because of fire hazards. Getting help to build the teacherage had been a battle royal and we knew better than to even ask for further assistance.

One day after school we borrowed shovels and began to dig. Several people came by to watch. This was not the time of year for planting a garden. No one said a word, and we offered no explanation. The following afternoon we were at it again and this time Salmonia mustered the courage to ask, "What you make?"

"What you think?" retorted Mildred.

Salmonia grinned. She offered a few minutes of her time. We took the liberty later in the week to let the older students out of school early one afternoon to get small logs five and six inches in diameter for us. The teen-agers balked, leaving us to finish our project by ourselves.

"So I'll do it myself," said the little red hen — and she did. We got our example out of the second-grade reader, and never so much as bothered any one for advice. We put down our first round of logs, measured it and figured the little house would be six by six. Inexperienced as we were, the work was painfully slow. It was not unusual to have but one round of stunted logs to show for two hours of labor, real labor.

Up about three feet, it showed a definite tendency to lean toward the river. It was a gigantic engineering feat to us. Boards were not the answer as we had none to spare. After studying it, Mildred hit upon the plan of placing a log upright in each corner to brace the building, then put four poles across the top to brace the braces. Those are not carpentry terms and it may not even be carpentry, but the idea worked. Our building showed a fine pattern with horizontal lines the lower half of it and vertical lines the upper half. We were fortunate to have an old door salvaged from our firewood cabin besides scraps of leftover tin for the roof. The villagers watched with awe.

Salmonia best expressed their feeling when she said, "Nice house. Why don't you put in bed and stove?"

Well she might ask that, because chinked and card-boarded well, the little house was less drafty than some of their dwellings.

Cardboard — without it interior decorating in Nikolai would have been shabby indeed. Every Saturday I spent hours in the schoolroom tacking pieces of it from packing boxes to the ceiling to keep the dried moss and sand from continually sifting down. The roof was steep and my position on a chair on a box on a table was not the safest. Our light tan ceiling was a decided improvement in both appearance and comfort although the job was a heavy one.

The Saturday I was helping Kathryn sled wood for the school we were hoisting six-foot logs, twelve to fifteen inches in diameter, onto a stack of our height. I knew that I was asking for trouble, but I couldn't stand to see Kathryn do the work alone. I knew too well what her coughing meant.

One more load to go. Up with a heavy log and about to place it on the pile when I got it part way up, my strength gave out and I dropped it in the snow. Another try. Again I could only reach the half way mark. I could not let go because I was holding it in such a way that to let go would mean dropping the log on myself. Salmonia saw my plight and came dashing. She lifted the log from me and placed it high on the stack.

I just stood, weak and alone, like a lost child miles from home. I was dazed without knowing which way to turn. I just stood. Salmonia jarred me to my senses, "You go home. I do it for you."

"Thank you, Salmonia." I pushed past the small children playing in our doorway, went into the teacherage, and threw myself across the bed. Always there were the little gestures to lighten the load. Dear Salmonia.

Evening slipped in finding us unprepared. Mildred glanced apprehensively at the clock and wondered aloud if

someone would get us water. Perhaps she should go herself. I objected because Mildred had been ill and for her to inhale the cold air spelled danger. I had recovered from the afternoon's experience enough to be able to go. The river, however, was freezing over, and the ice was safe only in certain places. I was unacquainted with those safety zones.

I was afraid to go alone. Whom should I ask for company? Happy. Happy did not know how to be anything but accommodating. I made my way out into the night and knocked at her cabin door.

"You go with me, Happy? Show me where to get water?"

"All right."

Happy and I, and an anemic flashlight, made our way through the darkness to the river bank.

"Happy, you are shaking. You sick?"

"Yes, I get out of bed."

"Why didn't you tell me? I wouldn't have asked you to come. Oh no, you don't carry pail. Just show me where to go. I get water."

Peering through the blackness, Happy pointed to what seemed a likely place and I gingerly tried my way down the bank. There was little snow and the mud was frozen like slick rock. My foot slipped and I sat. Without as much as a willow to grab, I slid all the way to the river, nor did I stop there, not until I was sitting in about six inches of water. No waterproof slacks! I howled with the cold and Happy's laughter rang out in the frosty air. That did her more good than medicine.

I picked my dripping self up from the ice and reached for the two water pails which had tumbled along beside me like two body guards. After filling the pails I tried to climb the incline only to lose part of the precious water. I struggled until I at last reached a point where Happy could lean over

the edge and take my pails. After depositing them on a level spot of ground, she reached out to help me as I scrambled to sure footing. Though I could not help but see the humorous side to my escapade, I did not covet a repeat performance. After that I went for water in broad daylight. As the weeks wore on, however, I discovered I was having to stop several times for a rest on my way back from the water hole. My old strength was gone. Sometimes my left arm turned numb and I could not carry two pails of water. Often Mildred had to go with me if one pailful was not sufficient to meet our needs. I feared we were fast wearing out.

Then it was that Nikita endeared himself to my heart. Whenever he would see us with water pails he would scold, "No, Teacher, no. Why you never tell me? I help you."

He did, too. Though he and his pals were sledding or playing target, he would leave the game if we needed water. So insistent was he that I learned to look for him before starting across the river ice toward the far shore. Together we shuffled through the snow, filled our pails, and tramped home again.

When at last we put our pails on the washstand and our icy gloves on the line behind the stove, he would go back to his play.

Again he would remind us, "You need water? Call me. I help you."

THIRTEEN :- We Bid Farewell

IT'S HARD to be a foreigner. A foreigner is in the minority and thrust upon him is a way of living he does not understand, a culture contrary to all his earlier concepts of that which is proper. One becomes a foreigner when he leaves his country to make home or fortune in another land.

The Alaska native is a foreigner, but he is a foreigner upon his own soil. He stayed at home and his home walls crumbled about him. He had sins enough of his own, but something new that promised to help him forget his losses was offered. He drank to drown his sorrow only to awaken to multiplied sorrows.

As always, the children suffer. The hard winter had played havoc with Agnes' lovely smile. Her quick, nervous movements became more noticeable. As she bent over her book, slender fingers pointing to each word as she read, I watched anxiously. She was beautiful. The sweetness and depth of character that comes with years came to her too soon. Was she meant for the small cruelties of a small village, rustling wood between pulmonary hemorrhages, keeping clean of body and mind when sin went on a rampage? She was so delicate a flower I wondered if she would ever come to full bloom. Or if, perhaps, God who sees the end from the beginning would choose to pick the bud fresh with morning dew before the heat of the noonday sun beat upon it.

One morning Agnes' place at school was vacant. I planned to run over to see her at recess, but I did not have that long to wait. Opening exercises were over and the children were

applying themselves to their books when her father burst into the schoolroom.

"Come. Come quick."

He hurried out again leaving the door ajar. Dropping my work, I dashed out and down the path behind him to the hovel where the sick girl lay.

A hovel it was, its roof thick with scraps of boards, bark, canvas, and rags that had been heaped on from time to time to keep out the rain and melting snow. Only about twelve by fourteen feet it housed three adults and seven children. The head of the home was crippled, unable to make improvements if he would. The very hopelessness of their lot expressed itself in the barest of furnishings coupled with the barest of housekeeping. On a cot near the stove lay Agnes, blood streaming from her nose and mouth, shaken with sobs of fear and trying to drink a cup of blistering tea her mother had given. Gently taking the cup from her, I poured its contents into the bucket by the door and gave her instead clear, cold water to drink.

"Here, Agnes, wash your mouth with clean water. Get a clean taste, then have good cold water to drink."

I helped the girl hold the cup to her shiny, swollen lips and held her in my arms as she burst afresh into tears. Her slight frame shook with sobs as I tried to console her. "No, Agnes, don't cry. That makes you bleed more. Don't be afraid. I'll be here with you and help you."

I bathed her burning face and arms until the cooling effect relaxed the patient who leaned against the pillow and closed her tired eyes. I asked for a hot-water bottle which I filled with ice water to use as a cold pack against her side. The family was reluctant to let me until I explained that they should keep her warm but the cold pack would help coagulate her blood. Within minutes the bleeding had stopped and Agnes was asleep. When I was certain her sleep was normal,

I returned to school after leaving definite instructions that I was to be called regardless of school or anything else if Agnes needed me.

Later in the day when Mildred was free to go with me, the call came. I did for the girl as I had done for her in the morning, but the bleeding was heavier and she was more upset and frightened. Her condition was aggravated by the number of people sitting around talking among themselves about her. We could grasp enough of the language to know the topic of conversation: Agnes was dying.

"No," I spoke up. "Don't say she is dying. That is not nice to scare her that way. Besides, lots of people have T.B. and get well. She is a sick girl, I know. We have to take care of her, to help her, not make her afraid."

Mildred finished talking to them while I worked with the child, my free hand stroking back her rumpled hair and bathing her dry, parched skin with a damp cloth. How I would have liked to put her between clean white sheets. When the bleeding subsided, Agnes dropped back wearily on her hard pillow.

"You feel better?" I asked.

A faint trace of a smile was her answer. She rested only a moment before she began again to choke and cough. She trembled and her eyes filled with tears as she looked at me with a plea for help. It was then that I saw her fear was worse than her illness. When courage is gone everything is gone. It was not enough that I worked and silently prayed. I must tell Agnes. What if there were those in the room who would rather that I not mention Christ's name, who were satisfied with themselves as they were, who lived for the church and yet rejected Christ? We do not stop working because of them, but press on. I *must* tell Agnes.

"Don't cry. You cry because you are afraid, but you don't have to be afraid. Jesus is with you. He knows how you

feel and He will stay right beside you. In springtime you hold little bird in your hand. You hold it real careful and nothing can hurt it. You are in God's hand same way. Nothing can hurt you.

"I hear them say you die tonight. I don't think you die tonight. Anyway, you don't have to be afraid of dying because that means you go home to Heaven. Jesus has made a special place up there for you and some day He will take you to be with Him. You aren't afraid to go to be with Jesus, are you? Some day you will go there, and some day I will go there too. Heaven is a happy place where never anybody sick and forever and ever we be with Jesus.

"Your family wants to go to bed so we have to go home. We are praying for you, Agnes, and don't you be afraid. All right?"

Again the suggestion of a smile stole across her face. She had passed the crisis for that night, but the battle was not won and we knew it. Going by a neighboring tent on our way home we heard boisterous laughter. The record player was blaring out jazz. A dance, not a native folk dance, nothing that nice at all. Dear Agnes, would the noise drift into the room where she tossed in restless sleep? O God, give her real sleep, real rest, in spite of this.

At home in our own cabin, Mildred reached for her Bible and placed it on the table. She did not open it for a while. We talked a long time, about our people, about ourselves, about the apparent fact that we had gone as far as we could. Nikolai's amazing growth of the first two years had been a thrill. Like any young child, it would now learn at a slower pace and like any child that is two going on three, it had its bad moments.

We were not equal to the task before us. The Department of Education was in the process of taking over our school and the coming year they could send in a couple. We knew

that teachers are not necessarily missionaries, but the school would go on. As for the spiritual work, we had laid a foundation. Radio programs and reading material would supplement our Story unless a missionary plane could make an occasional stop.

We would hold on until spring for the children who needed schooling. We would do our best for those who were hungry to know the Lord, for those who needed and wanted hospitalization, for Agnes who required our constant care, for the young man who meant well but never used his backbone. We would not be in the village to see the end result of all our labor, but neither would we leave prematurely. We were sent to Nikolai for a time, and God would give us the wisdom to know that time.

Three years! I wanted to leave and at the same time I did not. I would stay if I could, but I couldn't. Then I would go to another village and pioneer again. There would be other cabins and another Agnes somewhere.

My arm hurt. That numbness again. I rubbed it. I would, if my arm would let me. What I did not know then was a precious lesson that had to be learned away from the dark eyes I loved. My prayers would not be centered completely on the missionary who labored on distant shores. When others prayed for them, I would pray too, but I would be forced to add my postscript, "Lord, help the one who would give of his strength, but he has no strength to give." I would come to the realization that it is more important to love the Lord of the harvest field than to love the harvest field. There would be another lesson in losing without bitterness. All this I had yet to learn.

The light flickered. Mildred found her place in the Book and read of the Master who would gain an entrance into the hearts of men, but they would not. When doors were fast closed to Him, He forced not an entrance but turned

sorrowfully away. I brought it into the present tense. The same courtesy that characterized His earthly ministry was apparent even as He walked the paths of Nikolai village. He sees the few open doors, also those that stand half ajar, and there in love He lingers. Our human understanding fails, but His love never fails. He understands our native people, for He too was a foreigner on His own soil, soil He lovingly created with His own hands.

We prayed. "Lord, withhold not your hand, but in mercy reach down. Remember now the work of Thy servants, not for our sakes but for Thy Name's sake. *'Neither is he that planteth anything, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase.'*"

There is the dramatic in each of us. We think we would prefer to live one moment gloriously than to live hours tediously. There are those whose lives burst into a flame in the day of crisis, whose breath is spent quickly and who return to God. There are those of us who are asked to burn steadily. At times our little light flickers and we struggle to keep it shining in our given corner.

I looked at the snow and the northern lights; I listened to the howl of the malemutes; I watched the children as they bent over their books. I loved it, but we were tired. Perhaps we should never have come. Perhaps we should forget those coppery hands that reached out for help. Perhaps. No, don't say it. Never mind that all you wanted to accomplish failed to materialize completely. The full growth of a tree comes through many summers and equally as many winters. We can only begin a work, but what we have done goes on, completed when God says it is enough and puts this old worn-out world on His big shelf.

Work in Nikolai was barely begun. We could not stay for a fourth winter. Our replacement would come and in a few

years our school would be completely absorbed by a state department of education. The log building we were so pleased with might some day be only a landmark. Our missionary efforts? "Please, God, we leave that with You."

The weeks grouped into months, then came the morning when we were to go down river for the last time, leaving behind us our people. Grimy little faces grinned at us from the river bank. We smiled back, waving at the handful of adults who watched even as they had three years previous when we first stepped onto the river bar of the village.

Agnes, who had gained a bit of her strength, was walking about in the warm sunshine. She should have rested if there had been a place to rest, but we knew that for her there would never be another summer.

Kathryn was in a sanitarium regaining her health which had slipped rapidly away. She worked with her fingers as she planned toward a new start.

Bettescovia and Happy had signed for hospitalization. When the beds were available, they would have their chance to begin again.

The Skogomy and Alexie families were in their new cabins. Second Chief was getting logs to replace the old roadhouse we had used our first winter in the village.

I saw Nikita leave his tent with his blind uncle. I started to get out of the boat, but Mildred stopped me.

"You don't need to tell him good-by again."

No, I didn't, but I only wanted to tell him that my arm ached and to say how much we appreciated all those pails of water he had carried for us. Maybe he wouldn't have understood, and maybe I was getting sentimental.

I looked toward the long trail where last we saw Nikita on his way to fishcamp. He was now out of sight.

They all were, but not out of range of God's seeing and knowing.



1 1012 01228 2341

JUN 11 70		
JUL 19 1970		
AUG 8 1970		
GAYLORD		PRINTED IN U.S.A.

GAYLORD

PRINTED IN U.S.A.

